

Jennifer Hays

Owners of Learning

The Nyae Nyae Village Schools over Twenty-Five Years

Basel Namibia Studies Series 16



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JENNIFER HAYS

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The Nyae Nyae Village Schools
over Twenty-Five Years

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Cover photograph: A student at //Xa/hoba school looks on as a fellow learner writes his name in the researchers notebook (photo by Jennifer Hays, 2014).

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Basel Namibia Studies Series

In 1997, *P. Schlettwein Publishing* (PSP) launched the *Basel Namibia Studies Series*. Its primary aim was to lend support to a new generation of research, scholars and readers emerging with the independence of Namibia in 1990.

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Foreword

Reading this wonderful reflection by Jennifer Hays on the obstacles that San children and their parents confront in their efforts to achieve “a good education” has moved me in ways I did not expect. I time-travelled back over seventeen years to the discussions Jennifer and I had many times, always under the stars with glowing embers warming our winter-burnt faces, or summer thunderstorms chasing us into smoky grass and clay huts. All the while we were listening to the seemingly endless stories of San children who were being separated from their parents at a very young age and thrown into an alien culture and language environment. At night our thoughts would churn – is it right that children from communities like the San should be made to fit into a foreign education system? Or should that system be preparing to meet their needs – linguistic, emotional, cultural or even socio-political? Surrounded by the soft clicking sounds of people preparing for sleep, as the fires were burning low, we tried to imagine what good education would be like for people who still had one foot in their hunter-gatherer existence, while the other was trying not to slip on the unfamiliar ground of the modern world encroaching upon them from all directions.

We have heard the same stories in all the areas and among all the language groups we have consulted, interviewed, observed and assessed over the years, in places such as Dobe, Qangwa, Ghanzi and Kaputura in Botswana, the Caprivi Strip in Namibia, and the many villages in Nyae Nyae, where Jennifer later did her doctoral research on the Nyae Nyae Concerency’s Village Schools Project. Nyae Nyae is an important example for San education throughout southern Africa – it is the one place where a community has been trying to put into practice an education that could bridge this gap with the help of progressive thinkers, educationalists, linguists and anthropologists.

The deficiencies (as well as the advantages) of our own, western-based education systems came into sharper focus there in the sand, among the San huts and fire circles, as we observed a person sitting under a tree in the shade, surrounded by a small group of children of various ages. We imagined a school where the “blackboard” was the clean, soft sand they were sitting on; teaching aids would be manufactured there and then from dung and thorns and vines and seeds. The abacus would be made out of antelope droppings and berries strung together on a bow-string, or children would count pebbles, droppings or pods. The adult would have all the time in the world, therefore there was no competition to finish first, or to win or lose. The “class” would be allowed to watch a bateleur eagle do its swerves in the sky above or to laugh at a beetle’s tiny tracks crossing the letters or symbols they had just written in the sand. If the class got drowsy in the midday heat, everyone would doze off for

a while right there. If they wanted to have playtime, the adult would go to do some chores and come back to her post by the time the kids indicated readiness for another session.

All the peoples of the world started with such an education system, where parents owned the right and means to lead their children into a position of knowledge and understanding to cope with the demands of the adult world. Due to the pressure of modernity, all but the most marginalized have had to give that up for what is now considered “real” education. How did it come to be that the San parents of today – who should be honoured for the way they have managed to maintain their community education-in-action – are now considered to be “against education” or “not interested”?

Since at least the mid-1980s several studies and reports have addressed the topic of why so many San children drop out of school. Time and again the San parents attributed their lack of participation not to a lack of interest, but to a lack of consultation (Kann 1989). The report *Torn Apart* (Le Roux 1999), commissioned by the (then) Kuru Development Trust and the Working Group on Indigenous Minorities in southern Africa (WIMSA), is the result of one such study. Based on research that I conducted in 1998–1999, and with which Jennifer assisted, this study was the first to consult about education with San across the borders of three countries. One highlight of the findings was that the responses of San people in all three countries communicated resistance to the way their children were being educated and cared for – not resistance to education itself. The report also pointed out that such withdrawal was a common response of people from a hunter-gatherer background, and argued that workable solutions would include not only finding ways to involve San communities in existing education systems, but also ways to let San communities own the education of their children, even in a modern format. It emphasized that such an education should not alienate them from their language and culture and should especially avoid the violence of separation from their parents, and forced acculturation and assimilation.

Jennifer, a cultural anthropologist, has added to this debate from a position that is both highly informed and passionate, and has applied her research for the benefit of San children and their parents over many years. This book does not talk for the San people; it conveys a closely observed and intimately felt perspective, while at the same time amplifying the voices of so many San parents and elders who would otherwise not have had the opportunity to speak. May this book once and for all open those doors still closed for them by easing the understanding and softening the will of those who hold the power to change.

Willemien le Roux

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My fieldwork in Nyae Nyae over the years has been made possible through the financial and practical support of several different funding sources and institutions. Field research in 2001-2002, towards a PhD from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Albany, was funded by a Fulbright Fellowship for Dissertation Research, and the writing phase was partially funded through a University at Albany Initiatives for Women Presidential Award received in 2003. Several field visits were also sponsored by the University of Tromsø (UIT, the Arctic University of Norway) during a postdoctoral fellowship in social anthropology at that institution from 2007-2011. Research in 2011-2012 was funded by the European Research Council (ERC) project, Scales of Governance: The UN, the States and Indigenous Peoples (SOGIP; ERC project 24 92 36), led by Irène Bellier at l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS, Paris), where I had a postdoctoral research fellowship from 2011-2014. The Department of Archaeology and Social Anthropology at UiT, where I was employed during the main period of production of the manuscript in 2014-2015, provided funding for macro-editing and graphics.

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This book is dedicated to the Jul'hoansi of Nyae Nyae.

Note on terminology and orthography

Terminology

There is no perfect term with which to refer to the former hunting and gathering indigenous peoples of southern Africa. Where possible in this manuscript, I refer to cultural groupings using the name that these people use for themselves. When talking about a specific group, such as the Ju|'hoansi, this is not problematic. WIMSA has accepted the term *San* as the preferred over-arching term for the hunting and gathering groups indigenous to southern Africa and their descendants today. This term is used by many academics and is commonly used in South Africa and Namibia; the term *Bushmen* is also recognized and widely used in both of these countries. In Botswana, the term *Basarwa* is the most commonly used to refer to these same peoples. None of these three terms is really 'better or worse' than the others; all have derogatory origins, yet all have been reclaimed to a certain extent by those to whom they refer. In this book, I use the term *San* when referring to the overarching group, following the general usage of both academics and of the organizations that work on a national or regional level with this group of people. However, I do use the other terms in contexts where it is appropriate, for example, when referring to a discourse in which that term is used.

The terms *Khoe* or *Khoi* are used interchangeably to refer to the descendants of semi-nomadic pastoralists (formerly referred to as the Khoikhoi), who are often also considered indigenous to southern Africa. As a cultural grouping, this category includes the Nama and Damara groups, who speak the *Khoekhoegowab* language. The term *Khoisan* was coined as a linguistic classification of interrelated click languages, and is still often used. However, this term was contested by the San groups, who prefer the classification to be separated into *Khoe* and *San* (WIMSA 2004). This preference is respected here.

As with the Khoe- and San-speaking groups, where possible, Bantu-speaking groups are referred to by their specific names. However, where differences between the general groups are discussed, the term used to refer to the over-arching group is "Bantu-speaking peoples," acknowledging the common historical origin that is reflected in their languages.

The term *Ju|'hoan(si)* translates as "real person (people)" (*-si* is a plural marker in the language). *Ju|'hoan* is used as an adjective, as in "Ju|'hoan teachers" and *Ju|'hoansi* is used when referring to the language.

Orthography

There are two basic orthographic systems in use today by Khoe and San groups. All San names and words used in this book are spelled according to the particular orthography currently accepted for that language. The Jul'hoansi use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) system, below is a description of each of these sounds. Following Bieseke and Hitchcock, I include non-click “pronunciation guidelines” for words containing click symbols, for ease of reading (2011:xx). Specifically, the term Jul'hoan(si) can be pronounced as “Jutwan(si)” with the “oa” pronounced like “wa.”

<u>IPA symbol</u>	<u>description of click sound</u>
	dental click; tongue against front teeth (or substitute with “t”)
‡	alveolar-palatal click; tongue against alveolar ridge (or substitute with “t”)
!	palatal click; tongue against upper palate (or substitute with “k”)
	lateral click; produced at the sides of the tongue (or substitute with “k”)

Introduction

The *Village Schools* are an innovative and unique mother-tongue education initiative set in the Nyae Nyae Conservancy of northeastern Namibia. Conceived in the early 1990s and inspired by the optimism of a newly independent Namibia, the project was designed in close consultation with a hunter-gatherer community, the Ju'hoansi, and drew upon their traditional knowledge transmission strategies. Initiated in an enthusiastic and supportive political environment, the Village Schools design exemplified “best practice.” By the year 2000, however, the project seemed to be teetering on the edge of collapse. Of primary concern for many was the failure of its students to successfully transition to the government schools. Community members themselves expressed their frustration with the inability to make their voices heard. Since then the Village Schools have been through a number of transitions. Nonetheless, a quarter of a century after the inception of the project, Ju'hoansi learners seem to remain unable to successfully transition from the Village Schools to the central government school in Tsumkwe town for Grade 4 – much to the concern of the Ju'hoansi and others involved in the project.

In this book I strive to present a picture of a people who are actively and creatively responding to the opportunities they see before them. San communities, like many former hunter-gatherer populations today, are remarkably resilient, but they are also extremely vulnerable. Real improvement in their educational circumstances would allow them access to the skills they need to participate in both local and wider economies on their own terms. The issue is not solely about education – it is fundamentally about livelihood options and survival strategies, the maintenance of culture, language, and traditions. All of these relate to access to, and control over, land.

Who owns education?

The word today for teacher in the Ju'hoansi language is *n!arohkxao* (plural *n!arohkxaosi*) which translates directly as *owner(s) of learning*. The word *kxao* means ‘owner’ in the sense of having both a right to something, and responsibility for it. For example, the word used for the ‘owner’ of a village (*n!ore*), and the land associated with it, is *n!orekxao*. Although this is commonly translated as “chief,” the concept of land ownership among the Ju'hoansi has none of the hierarchical associations of the English term, which generally describes a person who has authority over others and in decision-making processes. The concept of *n!orekxao* implies a kind of stewardship and involves granting permission to others to use the land

while maintaining social relationships and ensuring that the resources on the land are not depleted through over-use.

There is no specific verb that means ‘to teach’ in Ju’hoansi; as in many languages, the words for *teach* and *learn* share the same root: *n!aroh*. The word *n!arohkxao* is used today to refer to teachers in schools – but the word *n!aroh* is also used to describe the ways in which parents teach their children the sophisticated skills and knowledge that they will need to become fully competent adults. In Ju’hoansi society, teaching and learning are integrated into everyday life, and they take place naturally – and effectively, as will be described in this book. In Ju’hoan society everyone owns learning.

The term *n!arohkxao*, however, describes a fairly new phenomenon, namely an individual whose “profession” it is to teach. The focus is placed upon a few individuals who are identified as those responsible for teaching; learning itself is re-defined as something that happens at a particular place and time separate from the normal activities of daily life, and where one’s progress is measured according to external standards. This book describes a project, The Village Schools, which was intended to bridge these two very different approaches to education. The *n!arohkxao*si – the teachers – were expected to base their lessons on the local environment, knowledge, and pedagogical style while simultaneously preparing the students for a system that was almost diametrically opposed to their own education strategies in every way.

Much has changed over the past 25 years – and much has stayed the same. This book explores the various aspects of the Village Schools, and of education generally in the Nyae Nyae Conservancy. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the educational situation and the questions that I address. It contextualizes both the Nyae Nyae community and my own research path within the educational context of southern Africa. In Chapter 2, I provide some background about the Nyae Nyae community, noting in particular their relationship with, and rights to, land. Chapter 3 discusses related literature in the field of indigenous education, examining patterns of exclusion and the role of culture in educational processes. The Ju’hoansi have been the focus of much anthropological research and Chapter 4 reviews the large body of literature about this group, with a focus on cultural patterns as they relate to child-rearing and educational practices.

Chapter 5 provides a chronological overview of the development of the Village Schools, and the various role-players and transitions over the years. Rather than telling the story of the Village Schools in a strict chronological order, however, I have chosen to organize the second half of the book topically, to best explore the various interwoven issues. In addition to highlighting the ways that various issues intersect, this approach allows us to see how the challenges have evolved – and how they have remained the same – over time. The five

“cardinal objectives” of the Village Schools Project outlined in Chapter 5 provide a useful structure for organizing this discussion, which is both about the Village Schools and, more broadly, about education in the Nyae Nyae Conservancy. Chapters 6 through 10 pick up several threads from the description of the history of the project described above, and will address in turn the (interconnected) issues outlined in the table of contents: Language, Teachers, Logistics, Transitions, and Community Consultation and Participation. In the conclusion, I take a closer look at the educational choices that the community is making, and contextualize this within local and national economic options. What options are available to people? What choices are they making? How do outsiders support their processes? Underlying all of these remains one central question – who owns education?



Fig. 1: Students from the school in ꞛOtcaqkxai, 2010

1 Background: a journey to Nyae Nyae

One Monday morning in late January, shortly after the start of the 2002 school year, I visited the “locations” or squatter settlements that surround the Kalahari desert town of Tsumkwe in northeast Namibia. I was accompanied by my field assistant Hanga Kxao †Oma¹ and Xoanll’an, a Ju’hoan mother and member of the Village School Project (VSP) School Board. Xoanll’an, like many other Ju’hoan parents, was concerned about the problems at Tsumkwe school, which caused the vast majority of children from the villages to drop out. We had heard that some recent events at Tsumkwe Junior Secondary School (TJSS) had caused a wave of dropouts, and we hoped to find out what children from some of these locations were doing on that school day.

A snapshot: †Aqbase² location, January 28, 2002

At the †Aqbase location, we find seven young girls, sitting around two fires between two grass huts, not far from each other. One girl is playing a game similar to jacks³ with some white stones; there is also a very small boy and a baby. Some of the girls are cooking locusts in the hot ashes of the fire. When they are done, the girls pull off the hard shell and the wings and with the back legs they pull out the insides, then they fill the cavity with salt and pop them in their mouths; they crunch like potato chips, and the smell reminds me of popcorn. The iridescent green-black wings lie scattered around the fire.

One girl comes from Aasvoëlnes⁴ and is currently in Grade 7 at TJSS. The others are from †Aqbase or villages nearby and are in Grades 4 or 5. They all say they are going to school, “but not today.” Some of them are staying in the school hostel, some stay in the locations. When I ask how it is going for those at the hostel, they inform me that some of them have run away because of “problems with stealing,” and are now staying in the Djxokhoe location (another small squatter camp). They say that many Ju’hoan children have left the

¹ During my field work period of 2001 and 2002, I relied greatly upon Hanga and my other assistant, Garo, a !Xun woman who had been at school in Tsumkwe. They were my linguistic and cultural interpreters in the complex social landscape of Nyae Nyae.

² The village of †Aqabase had a Village School, but it had recently closed for lack of water when their pump broke. Four adults had come to stay near Tsumkwe to provide support for the children who were attending TJSS, but at the time of our visit they were elsewhere.

³ Also called knucklebones.

⁴ A village just outside of the Nyae Nyae Conservancy with a high population of Ju’hoansi. The next closest primary school is located there.

hostel. I ask the girls if they are still going to school – presumably they should be there now if they are. They all say yes. One says she is still schooling, she is just not in school today. Another girl says she has a headache and wanted to stay at home today. Some of the others say that they did not get their school books and so they are not at school right now. When we ask about the boys, they say “the boys are not at school.”

As we are sitting there, some boys walk up; two of them are among those who were recently accused of breaking the hostel fence – the story is circulating among the Ju’hoansi in Tsumkwe and we have heard about the accusation. Hanga calls them over to find out their side of the story. The two boys, who say they are about 13 and 15⁵ years old, explain that they were staying at the hostel, but one night they and three other Ju’hoan boys came back late and the gate was locked. They saw a hole in the fence and squeezed in there, but someone saw them and told the principal that they had made the hole. The principal then told them to “fix the fence, pack their things, and go.”

When I ask them what they are going to do now, one says he will not go back to TJSS. “I want to learn,” he says, “but I will not go back to that school...Aasvoëlnes is too far, I want to stay in this area.” He doesn’t know what he will do. The other one expresses regret that they had not received a warning, but had just been “chased away” without being able to give their side of the story. “I won’t go back,” he says. By this time, two more young men have joined us and one gives his story:

It happened to me also. Before 2000 I was schooling here in Tsumkwe. My father was sick, and so I asked permission [to miss school and go to him]. I stayed away one week and then came back. Then I was told I could not just leave and come back like that. My teacher said I stayed too long away, so he cannot teach me. The principal said I should not bother to come back, she sent me home, so I just left.

Despite these problems some years back, this young man says he is ready to try again and has started Grade 4. This time, he says, the problem is blankets. He had been sharing a blanket with one of the boys present who was accused of breaking the fence, but since that boy left, he no longer has a blanket. “I also don’t have any books” he says, “that is why I am not there today.” While we are still talking to these boys, some smaller boys come by, pushing a hand-made wire car through the sand; we recognize them as Grade 1 and 2 learners from TJSS. They tell us that their teacher is absent today, so they are not in school. Xoan||’an then remarks that her son must be in their class; she says he has been riding around on donkeys all day because the teacher is not there.

⁵ Many people in Nyae Nyae do not know exactly how old they are.

Over the short course of about an hour spent in this one location, I encountered more than a dozen children ranging in age from about seven to 15, boys and girls, who said they were in (or had recently been in) Grades 2 through 7 – all of whom were not in school on this Monday shortly after the start of the new school year in 2002. Of these children, most considered themselves to be “school goers,” although they had – for various reasons – chosen not to attend on this particular day. Others had already dropped out, each for specific reasons. Furthermore, these children were not the only ones in their positions. Each conversation indicated that there were larger patterns: other girls who had abandoned the hostel, a few more boys who were in the party of the accused, another who related to the experience, and a classroom of children who were wandering around the town in the absence of a teacher.

This excerpt from my fieldnotes provides a snapshot of the relationship between Jul’hoansi learners and Tsumkwe schools. Though it was “taken” at a particular point in time, it is representative of ongoing struggles that the Jul’hoansi have with education in Nyae Nyae. Just as this group of youth represents larger patterns in their community, the problems confronting the San in the Tsumkwe district are present for San communities throughout southern Africa. San children participate less than any other group in the education systems of their countries. Government and non-government organizations (NGOs) in Botswana, South Africa, and Namibia have invested funds, materials, and other resources and tried various approaches to incorporate San learners into existing mainstream education systems (Le Roux 1999, 2002; Saugestad 2000; Hays 2007; Hopson and Hays 2008; Kiema 2010). Across the region we see small steps towards achieving some measure of success for San communities in the mainstream systems. However, though the numbers of San children accessing some schooling are going up slowly, the dropout rates are still extremely high in comparison with other groups in the region.

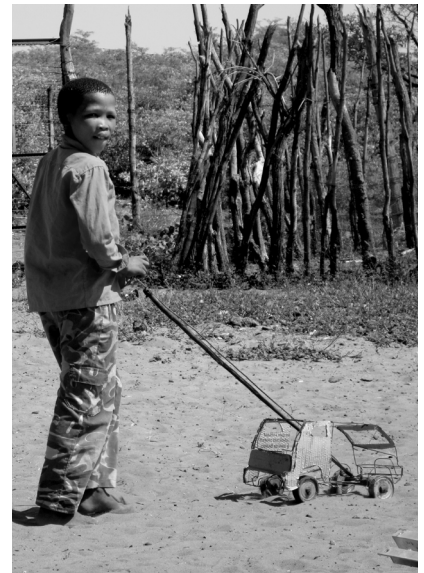


Fig. 2: A boy in ||Xa|oba village pushing a handmade wire car, in 2011

This situation is in turn representative of larger global patterns. Indigenous peoples, especially hunters and gatherers, face numerous well-known problems in formal education systems, the solutions to which are far from obvious. Set within this global, regional (southern African), and national context, my research explores one example of the effort to provide more effective, respectful, and meaningful education for a small group of people living in northwestern Namibia.

Nyae Nyae Ju'hoansi within the southern African context

The Nyae Nyae Ju'hoansi live in what is now called the Nyae Nyae Conservancy (NNC; also referred to as “the Conservancy”⁶), where they maintain control over their land and its resources. They are one of several linguistic and ethnic groups who belong to the larger category of *San*, also known as *Bushmen* (or, in Botswana, *Basarwa*) – who are generally agreed to be the original inhabitants of southern Africa. Formerly hunters and gatherers (also called foragers, see Barnard 2000), today the San live primarily in small, scattered settlements in remote areas, or as farm workers. Residing mostly in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Angola, and in small numbers in Zambia and Zimbabwe, the San participate only marginally in national politics and the cash economy. While other groups in southern Africa have also experienced dispossession and violence, and remain economically, politically and socially marginalized across the region, the San are at the very bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy.

The Ju'hoansi of Nyae Nyae are fortunate to have a much greater degree of autonomy than most other San; they are the only group today who has access to and control over part of their original territory. This does not translate into greater participation in the wider social, economic or political arenas. In fact, the reverse often seems to be true. Over the past half-century, the Ju'hoansi have experienced extensive attention from anthropologists, development workers, missionaries and national governments, including the incorporation of Ju'hoan men into the South African Defense Force (SADF) during the country's war for independence (achieved in 1990; see Chapter 2). Despite efforts to include them in mainstream education, politics, and national life, the Ju'hoansi remain among the most marginal of all Namibian minorities.⁷

⁶ In general I use the Conservancy when referring to the physical place, and NNC when referring to the organization and legal aspects.

⁷ Interestingly, two of the most prominent San politicians in Namibia have been Ju'hoansi men – Kxao Moses (deceased in 2013) and Royal |Ui'oo!o, mentioned in Chapter 2. This is at least partially due to the political mobilization of Nyae Nyae in the 1980s (see Chapter 2 and Bieseke and Hitchcock Chapter 11). These impressive examples notwithstanding, overall Ju'hoansi succeed at

The Ju'hoansi and other San communities recognize the advantages that formal education could provide, including greater economic opportunity and an increased voice in decision-making processes that affect them. However, the participation of San children in government schools across southern Africa has largely been characterized by very high dropout rates. There are many interrelated reasons why this is the case, including those related to poverty, social stigmatization, unfriendly school and



Fig. 3: A group of children in ||Xa||oba Village School in 2009

hostel environments, the problems associated with learning in a foreign language and culture, a relative lack of examples of successful San students, and the lack of correspondence between formal education and real economic opportunity in the areas where San are living. Efforts by governments and NGOs to increase educational attendance of San children usually focus upon trying to convince parents to send their children to schools, and/or upon improving access to the schools by providing assistance with school fees, uniforms, and toiletries, transportation to the school, or accommodation at the school (hostels). Occasionally, efforts are made to make the school environment more welcoming. In general, however, these efforts have not resulted in increased participation in school over the long term.

Schooling at Nyae Nyae

The most extensive effort to improve educational opportunities for a San community is the Nyae Nyae Village Schools, which grew out of a collaborative effort in the newly-independent Namibia in response to Ju'hoan children's lack of participation in the government school in Tsumkwe. Begun in the early 1990s, the *Nyae Nyae Village Schools Project* (VSP) was intended to incorporate the holistic approach to education that already existed in the Ju'hoan community into an educational approach that would also help them access "modern" skills. The focus of the Village Schools is on providing schooling closer to home

lower rates than other San in the education systems.

that builds upon the language, knowledge and skills from Jul'hoan communities, *and* that ultimately prepares children to be successful in the government schools. This project is the central focus of this book and will be described in detail in the following chapters.

The mainstream government schools are located in Tsumkwe in the center of the Conservancy (see following chapter and fig. 22 on p. 98) along with a clinic, shops, churches, all government offices, and other services (and, since 2004, the NNC office). Most of the Jul'hoan residents of Nyae Nyae live in small villages scattered throughout the Conservancy but many live in the town of Tsumkwe, where they make up about half of the population. There is much movement between the villages and the town. In 2002, when the scene described in the opening section of this chapter is set, there was only one school in Tsumkwe, TJSS, which included Grades 1 to 10. This has changed since; today, there is a separate primary school, and the secondary school goes up to Grade 12, although, as described in Chapter 7, there are no Jul'hoansi – or other San – learners in the highest grades. Since 1994, children in some villages can go up to Grade 3 at the local Village School, but from Grade 4 upwards the only option for formal schooling is in the town.

The schools have hostels to house students who come from outside of the town, and some Jul'hoan children from the villages can stay there. However, these student accommodations are often not a very friendly place for Jul'hoansi children and many leave school because of problems associated with the hostel. Over the years, in an effort to provide better living conditions for their children, many of the Nyae Nyae villages have sent a few adults to Tsumkwe to look after the children who were attending TJSS. These families live in the



Fig. 4: An unofficial settlement within Tsumkwe town

makeshift camps on the fringes of Tsumkwe described above, locally known as “locations.”⁸ These small camps provide a bit of shelter and a place to be with caring adults from the children’s own villages. However, there is not always enough food for children staying with their relatives, and during the rainy season the shelters leak and students’ papers can become wet; reasons such as these also often cause children to drop out of school.

The existence of the Village Schools, and concern for the project, was the primary reason for (and focus of) my various research periods in Nyae Nyae, as I describe below in this chapter. However, although the story of the Village Schools is central to the story of education in the Nyae Nyae area, it is not the *whole* story. The problem of “education” is intimately connected with so many other issues for the Jul’hoansi – including land, livelihood opportunities, political participation and, ultimately, self-determination. In this book, the Village Schools, and discussions about it, are the lens through which educational issues and the broader, interrelated questions and concerns facing the Nyae Nyae Jul’hoansi – and other San – come into focus.

Background of this book

At times when I was working on this book, it felt like it was “writing itself.” My notes from hundreds of conversations with Jul’hoan individuals and groups – transcriptions of audio recordings of meetings and formal interviews, fieldwork summaries written in my tent at night by candlelight, scraps of information hastily jotted in moving vehicles – sometimes seemed to be weaving themselves seamlessly together, revealing clear patterns which formed a story that wanted to be told. Even though, after nearly two decades of research, I am confident in the arguments I am making, I do not claim to be speaking for the Jul’hoansi, or any other San. I have selected representative quotes by individuals and stories for this publication, in an effort to make their voices come through as much as possible. But ultimately, the perspective in this book, however well-informed it may be, is my own. The rest of this introduction recounts my own journey to, and with, the Nyae Nyae Jul’hoansi. In doing so, I provide the “backdrop” to the story of the Village Schools.

An enormous amount of ethnographic research has been conducted on and with the San, and with the Jul’hoansi in particular; indeed they have been described as being among the “most studied, and best studied of any ethnic group in the world” (Barnard 1992:13).

⁸ The use of “location” in this sense comes from the Afrikaans term “lokasie” often used to refer to the non-white townships. Today, both the English and Afrikaans terms are frequently used throughout Namibia to refer either to specific sections of a town, or to informal settlements on the outskirts of a town; a location is usually associated with people of a particular ethnic identity or a particular geographical origin or village, as is the case with the “locations” described here.

Given the romanticism surrounding the Nyae Nyae Jul'hoansi in popular and academic literature, it would not be surprising if I said I'd fallen in love from afar with the culture so beautifully described by the Marshall family, Richard Lee, Megan Bieseke, Marjorie Shostak, Richard Katz and many others – and embarked on a mission to conduct my PhD research in Nyae Nyae. In fact, I did not set out with the explicit intention of conducting my field research among one of the most studied ethnic groups in the world. My route to Nyae Nyae was indirect and my relationship with the Jul'hoansi developed gradually as I became familiar with them, their land and their circumstances as they opened up their homes and lives to me. Describing the path by which I arrived there allows me to provide a bit of the regional and national context in which this famous site is embedded.

1998 – First visit to southern Africa and the new Nyae Nyae Conservancy

I first visited Nyae Nyae in 1998 during a three-month trip to southern Africa to investigate the possibilities of conducting extended field research on San language and education issues for my PhD in Anthropology.⁹ A couple of years earlier I had taken a language course in Setswana, a Bantu language spoken in Botswana and South Africa, for my studies in linguistics¹⁰ and subsequently decided to shift my focus from studies of language contact to the role of language and education in the broader processes of political and social participation and exclusion. Around this time, I attended a lecture by Robert Hitchcock, an anthropologist who has worked extensively in southern Africa, about the challenges the San in Botswana were facing regarding land rights. I asked him whether language and education were issues of concern for the San, and he replied emphatically that they were; some days later I received a package with several relevant documents and the contact information of organizations working with the San. Intrigued and inspired, I began preparing for a preliminary field trip to southern Africa.

During that visit, in the first months of 1998, I investigated the regional dynamics and visited communities and projects across southern Africa. Like many others, I saw the Nyae Nyae Village Schools Project as an important model of an education alternative for San communities. I was not thinking of the project as a potential field site at that stage, mostly because of the already existing interest in this area. As I had already studied Setswana, my intention was to identify a research site in Botswana; I also intended to focus on a community that had received less attention. Nonetheless, I knew that it was important to be

⁹ Received in May 2007, from the State University of New York (SUNY), at Albany (Hays 2007).

¹⁰ In 1996 and 1999, I received a Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship to study Setswana at the Summer Cooperative African Language Institute at the University of Ohio and Yale University, respectively.

familiar with the Village Schools Project, and I visited Nyae Nyae for a week to find out more about how it functioned.

I drove up to Nyae Nyae from Windhoek with the Village Schools Coordinator. At that time, the VISCO (as this position was called) was an Australian woman who lived in a wooden rondavel in Baraka village¹¹ with her husband, who was also working in the area with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) program described below. Baraka, then the headquarters of the former Nyae Nyae Farmers Cooperative (NNFC), was designed by a Windhoek architect and built in 1989 with funding from the Ju/wa-Bushman Development Fund (JBDF – see below and Chapter 5). Less than 10 years later, in 1998, it appeared to be an efficient and well-kept center of administration for the Cooperative and the Village Schools. I stayed in one of the wooden rondavels with another volunteer, who was working on crafts production and marketing. I met other expatriate volunteers, and the Ju'hoansi working for the NNFC; I also accompanied the VISCO on her school visits, including an overnight stay in the village of ||Xaloba, which had a Village School. Although I did not know it at the time, this village was to become important in my understanding of the educational dynamics in Nyae Nyae.

The year 1998 was an eventful one for the Ju'hoansi, and for San development initiatives in the region. At the time of my visit, the WWF and the NNFC were preparing for Nyae Nyae to become the first Conservancy in Namibia in June of that year, and there was much activity around those preparations (see also Chapter 2). My preliminary research trip also coincided with the planning stages of the *Regional San Education Program*, an effort initiated by WIMSA that aimed to develop cross-border approaches to San educational issues. I consulted with representatives from the (then) Kuru Development Trust¹² in D'kar, Botswana, an NGO working closely with WIMSA. Both organizations encouraged me to pursue my interest in the education issues affecting the San in Botswana. In particular, Willemien le Roux, one of the founders of Kuru, provided me with much insight and encouragement, and became an important mentor as I began to work with and research the complicated issues surrounding San education.

January 1999: The Regional Survey on San Education

Also in 1998 and 1999, Willemien le Roux was conducting the fieldwork for the Regional Survey on San Education, undertaken at the request of the San communities that WIMSA

¹¹ This village derives its name from the SADF army barracks previously located there (Bieseke and Hitchcock, 2011:134).

¹² This organization, begun in the early 1980s by Braam and Willemien le Roux, has subsequently split into several separate NGOs. These are now linked through the Kuru Family of Organizations (KFO), an affiliated group of NGOs in Botswana and South Africa.

and Kuru worked with across the region. I was asked to assist with this survey, and in January 1999, Willemien and I conducted fieldwork with Jul'hoansi and Khwe communities in Ngamiland (northwestern Botswana). The findings of Le Roux's region-wide study highlighted the following two connected concerns:

1. In spite of a relatively long history of formal education for San children in certain areas, the majority of San children were not finishing their formal education, while the handful of San who did mostly had unsatisfactory results for tertiary education
2. Many of the San youth who had gone through primary school were demonstrating signs of cultural alienation and were turning their backs on their identity and background. Formal education was "stealing" the San's children from them (Le Roux 1999:7)

The results of this survey are outlined in the report *Torn Apart*, which concluded, among other things, that there was an urgent need for a comprehensive regional program of action addressing education as part of a total development crisis the San were currently experiencing. Furthermore, the report emphasized that "no educational intervention with a long-term vision should be implemented if the ownership does not lie in the hands of the communities" (Le Roux 1999:121).

During these early visits it became clear to me that education presented enormous problems for San communities across the region, and was in some ways at the very heart of their marginalization. San communities desperately needed representatives who could 'speak the languages' of the dominant groups – at national and international levels – and schools were the place to learn these communicative competencies as well as other necessary skills. Contrary to popular belief, San parents wanted their children to attend school, and the students themselves saw schooling as their best opportunity. Having lost their land base, many San communities were desperately poor and school was seen as a way to gain access to employment and in turn much-needed cash. Yet the schooling process itself separated youth from their communities in what was often a very painful process. Unfortunately, the harsh experience of the early years of schooling did not appear to yield long-term benefits; San students across the region experienced extremely high dropout rates, and few made it beyond the first years of school, with only a small percentage gaining an official certification of any kind. This apparent contradiction was recognized and expressed in various ways by San communities across the region, as reflected in Le Roux's two points above.

2000 – 2001: the Regional San Education Program

In mid-2000, the second phase of the Regional San Education Programme began, which involved establishing the 'comprehensive regional program' that Le Roux had recommended. While the involvement and control of local communities was a priority, it was also recognized that for this to happen, much else had to be in place. These included appropriate educational policy, government buy-in, and of course, funding. Existing efforts to improve education, such as the Nyae Nyae Village Schools and a small handful of other (differently focused) efforts throughout the region needed to be brought into a network. I was offered a one-year contract with WIMSA as a long-term consultant for this phase, and my work involved researching language and educational policy and government programs relevant to San communities in Namibia, Botswana and South Africa, surveying current efforts to address San education issues, liaising with donors and potential donors, identifying and cultivating opportunities for networking across borders, and coordinating national and regional conferences.

This phase culminated in the First Regional San Education Conference held in Okahandja, Namibia in May 2001. This conference brought together a wide variety of stakeholders from across the region in an effort to facilitate communication among those involved in San education initiatives at all levels and to design a concrete plan of action to address the educational needs of southern Africa's San communities. The recommendations of the conference included the formation of a regional task force on San education, and at the Regional San and Nama Languages Meeting, held in Kimberley, South Africa in 2002, the Southern African San Education Forum (SASEF) was formed. The original purpose of SASEF was to serve as a platform for the ministries of education in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia for exchanging information and ideas about San education with San organizations and communities. Their primary areas of concern included the development of educational materials in San languages for use in schools, as well as addressing the high dropout rate and the limited employment opportunities for San youth throughout the region. The position of Regional Education Advisor at WIMSA, created in 2002, included acting as the regional coordinator for SASEF and heading the Regional San Education Program.¹³ The Regional Mother Tongue Conference, hosted by the University of Botswana in Gaborone in June 2005, brought the discussions begun in these earlier meetings to a series of recommenda-

¹³ The Regional San Education Program has implemented Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs in San communities, as well as programs that aimed to ensure that more San youth successfully complete higher education and further training and that skills and knowledge acquired can be used to support the development of San communities and organizations in the future (see Haraseb 2011).

tions for government policy and a set of resolutions for those already active on the ground to engage (Hays 2006a; Kamwendo et al. 2009).

2001: Research environments in Botswana and Namibia

During the time that I was working closely with the Regional San Education Program (May 2000–June 2001), there was a high level of attention focused on the Nyae Nyae Jul’hoansi and their Village Schools Project. The project seemed to embody all the hopes and the complex frustrations of San education efforts across the region. I visited the Nyae Nyae area again in September of 2000, and I met frequently with Jul’hoansi language activists from Nyae Nyae when they travelled to Windhoek and Gaborone to participate in workshops or conferences. I began to develop friendships with some of them and we spoke at length about the issues that confronted the Nyae Nyae Village Schools Project.

As noted above, I had proposed to conduct my dissertation research in Ngamiland, Botswana. I had already taken Setswana classes, conducted background research and received funding for this study.¹⁴ However, around that time the government of Botswana issued a moratorium on research investigating the *Basarwa* (as the San are called in that country). The government perceived researchers, especially anthropologists, as working against the interests of national unity under one ethnic identity – *Batswana*.¹⁵ Research into ethnic minorities, particularly the Basarwa, was seen as divisive, harking back to the racial distinctions of apartheid. Although I made efforts to frame my study as something that would be beneficial to Botswana’s educational efforts in general, my proposal to focus on how linguistic and cultural differences impact on the school success of marginalized minorities in Ngamiland was never approved by the government of Botswana.

The Namibian authorities, on the other hand, welcomed my proposal to investigate San educational issues. I therefore changed plans and prepared to conduct research in Namibia beginning in the middle of 2001. Ironically, although Namibia had experienced the direct effects of a colonial apartheid government, the newly independent nation ultimately took the opposite approach to that of Botswana. The ministry responsible for education recognized the importance of mother tongue education; their policy explicitly stated that all children had the right to education in their home language for at least the first three years.¹⁶ Furthermore, a government document called “National Policy Options for Educationally

¹⁴ I received a Fulbright award for dissertation research for my proposed fieldwork in Botswana, which I was allowed to transfer to my research in Namibia.

¹⁵ *Ba* is the prefix in Setswana indicating the plural of *person*.

¹⁶ The initial post-independent policy was to begin with English in Grade 1, but this approach quickly fell into disfavor because most children did not speak English, and it was recognized that a transition period of education in the mother tongue was needed.

Marginalized Children” had just been released in 2000, which identified the San as “the most educationally marginalized” children in the country:

Their parents are poor and illiterate and culturally marginalized, and therefore find it difficult to get their children into school and keep them there. The formal education system, with its educational managers and administrators, and its teachers and learners, is often not sympathetic towards the San people...The San are considered primitive. They are at the very low end of the social scale and treated accordingly. Learners from other language groups tend to look down upon the San learners and discriminate against them, particularly in the hostels. [MBESC 2000:12]

Although it is noted that there are exceptions, the document clearly states that the main barrier to facilitating the education and training of the San children is “the attitudes of others” (ibid.), recognizing the substantial structural barriers that San face in accessing education (see Chapter 3).

One response to the National Policy Options document was the creation of a special branch of the (then) Ministry of Basic Education, Sport, and Culture (MBESC) with a specific mandate to address educational challenges of the San and other marginalized minorities: the Intersectoral Task Force on Educationally Marginalized Children (referred to by the not particularly pronounceable acronym ITFEMC, or often just “EMC”). This body was an important one for the Regional San Education Program, and I had attended several meetings and planning sessions with ITFEMC members. The San were a group who caused much concern, and the Task Force sought better understanding of the reasons behind this marginalization and ways in which to improve it. I proposed three possible field sites to them and asked for their guidance on where I could direct my focus. The Village Schools Project was one of my proposed sites, and the ITFEMC identified this as the most important and useful to government efforts to improve education. I consulted with WIMSA and the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia (NNDNF), the Windhoek-based support organization for the Nyae Nyae Conservancy (NNC), and later with the NNC and San individuals from Nyae Nyae. The Village Schools Project was under intense scrutiny at the time, and it seemed to be struggling to stay afloat (which, as a South African colleague pointed out, was particularly worrisome for a “flagship” project). I was strongly encouraged by all relevant organisations to investigate the project in order to figure out what was going wrong. I travelled up to Nyae Nyae to request permission and advice from Jul’hoansi leaders and community members. People in Nyae Nyae responded that they were also very concerned about education in general, and that I would be welcome to stay in the Nyae Nyae Conservancy and conduct fieldwork focusing on education. I moved to the area in July 2001.

2001 – 2002: field work in Nyae Nyae

From mid-2001 through mid-2002, I spent most of my time in the Nyae Nyae Conservancy, living for stretches at the headquarters in Baraka and also in Tsumkwe; I also spent several weeks at each of the villages with schools. I worked closely with interpreter Kxao Petrus ‡Oma, who I know as Hanga, as my interpreter for Jul'hoansi, and Katrina Tsaraos, who I knew as Garo, a !Xun woman who had gone to school in the area and spoke fluently almost every language used there. My previous research and coordinating work at the regional level had provided me with an understanding of the patterns of educational exclusion faced by San across the region – patterns that also play out for indigenous peoples globally. These include the separation of children from their families from a young age while they attend schools (often boarding schools far from their communities) where they are taught foreign systems of knowledge, in a language other than their own, by teachers from cultures that are different from, dominant to, and discriminate against their own, and who use instruction and disciplinary styles that do not match those of the students' home life. Though local specifics will vary, for all indigenous peoples some combination of the above factors and others add up to an experience of overall poor performance in formal education systems accompanied by high dropout rates. This was the frame of reference I brought with me to Nyae Nyae; my goal was to understand how these global dynamics take shape in a particular case and what solutions might best address them.

This background had also given me exposure to and insight into the discourses used by various 'stakeholders' in San development and education. These included local and international NGOs, educationalists, government officials at various levels, international donors, a handful of San activists and, of course, other researchers. I was immediately struck by the number of parallel conversations simultaneously taking place around the education issues at Nyae Nyae and the variety of interpretations as to the source of and solutions to the problems. Although there was a great deal of emphasis on community consultation, the community members themselves perceived it as virtually impossible to voice their needs and desires. It became apparent during my fieldwork that the enormous power differential among participants in the "conversation" affects how decisions are made, and that the community experiences great frustration with this dynamic.

An educational paradox

At the core of my research and work with Nyae Nyae is an exploration of the educational paradoxes that the Village Schools represented. On the one hand, the project seemed to embody everything that one could hope for in an indigenous education project, exemplifying "best practice" from a number of different angles. It was conceived and introduced in the

exciting wake of Namibian Independence, in a national education environment characterized by progressive educational policies and recognition of the benefits of mother tongue education and the value of traditional culture and knowledge. For example, one government report from the period notes that

[t]he [Ministry of Education and Culture][...] has a special responsibility for language ecology, and the ecology of knowledge [...] [this means] finding ways of building on the accrued insight, wisdom and skills of the Bushmen in relation to the demands of changing Namibian society, and the new curriculum. [Swarts and Avenstrup 1995:22]

In line with such progressive thinking, the concept of the project was received positively by the government and the donor community and received substantial start-up and maintenance funding. Designed by a team of educationalists and anthropologists in close consultation with the Nyae Nyae community, the emphasis of the VSP was on both the importance of traditional culture and knowledge systems, as well as the need to access mainstream education systems. The Nyae Nyae Village Schools Project seemed destined for success, incorporating the best from educational theory, working with people (the Ju'l'hoansi) whose traditional approach to knowledge transmission exemplifies ideal learning strategies described in the field of progressive education (see Chapter 3) and was initiated in an enthusiastic and supportive environment. These initial stages of the project, and the parallel development of the Conservancy, will be described in Chapters 4 and 5.

However, almost ten years after its conception, in 2001 the project seemed to be teetering on the edge of collapse. Donor funding had diminished in anticipation of the Village Schools' transition to government schools and yet this transition was problematic in many ways. Even more problematic was the transition of the children from the Village Schools to the mainstream school in Tsumkwe. In fact, this transition was almost the sole measure of the "success" or "failure" of the project. Since the VSP students did not appear to be making this transition successfully, the project itself was seen to be "failing."

The Ju'l'hoansi of Nyae Nyae were not silent on this issue. They expressed their needs and desires in a variety of contexts, including in formal consultation meetings, in internal committee meetings, to researchers (myself included), and in their day-to-day actions and decisions about whether or not to attend the schools available to them. However, as I will explore in Chapter 10, these requests seemed to go almost entirely unacknowledged within the broader arena of education and development for the Ju'l'hoansi. Thus, another frustrating paradox emerged: why, in a project so carefully designed to be participatory, were the requests that they made so routinely ignored or dismissed? How could the Ju'l'hoansi – and other San – obtain greater control over their educational choices? Indeed, in what ways are they already making strategic choices that perhaps go unrecognized? These became

the questions around which my research centered, and which are addressed throughout this book.

Transitions

In the years immediately following this research period (ending in May 2002), the Village Schools Project (VSP) and its support institutions went through a series of changes. My life also underwent some significant transitions during this period, and I was moving between Namibia and the United States with my young daughter, variously writing my doctoral thesis, teaching university courses in upstate New York, and working as a consultant on several projects related to the San and/or education in southern Africa, in Botswana and Namibia. During this period, among other positions,¹⁷ I conducted two consultancies with Letloa, the support organization for the Kuru Family of Organisations (KFO) in Botswana, both of which were sponsored by De Beers Botswana.¹⁸ The first was to work with a team of specialists from Botswana and South Africa to design the *San Schools Project*, which later was renamed the *Minority Education Project*. This project was reformulated as the Support Program for Education in Remote Areas (SPERA). For both of these (related) projects, the Village Schools was an important example and model – and intended partner. Unfortunately, despite multiple promises of funding by De Beers Botswana, both of these ultimately fell through because the mother tongue education aspect of the projects was said to conflict with Botswana's language in education policy.

Although not directly involved with the Village Schools during this time, nor with the transition of the project, I followed the process through meetings with Ju'hoan individuals at regional conferences and others involved with new developments at Nyae Nyae. In 2003 I traveled up to Nyae Nyae with a volunteer for Kalahari Peoples Fund who was working with the Ju'hoan Transcription Group (J.T.G., see Chapter 6); I brought my daughter (then 8 months) along for her first visit to Nyae Nyae. In 2004, responsibility for the Village Schools was transferred to the Government of Namibia. The Norwegian organization, the Namibian Association of Norway (known as NAMAS in Namibia and *Namibiaforeningen* in Norway) agreed to support the government in their running of the Village Schools. This handover coincided with the decentralization of the Ministry of Education and responsibility for the

¹⁷ Including rapporteuring for international conferences on language and educational issues, facilitating workshops for local organizations, and writing reports about indigenous rights in Namibia and San education for international organizations.

¹⁸ Though not explicitly connected, De Beers' desire to invest in San education coincided with negative press they were getting related to diamond mining and the expulsion of San from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve.

schools was transferred to the Regional Education Office, based in Otjiwarango – this transition is discussed in Chapter 9.

After receiving my doctoral degree from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Albany in 2007, I accepted a post-doctoral fellowship in Comparative Indigenous Studies at the University of Tromsø (UiT) in Norway – the northernmost university in the world.¹⁹ Although people often noted that this arctic location was a strange place from which to study southern Africa, the Department of Social Anthropology at UiT has had a longstanding relationship with the region, in particular through the work of Sidsel Saugestad. In 2001, Saugestad initiated the cooperation between UiT and the University of Botswana (UB) to develop the San Research Centre – inspired by the Centre for Sami Studies at the University of Tromsø (see Bollaane and Saugestad 2015). Being based at an institution that has ongoing relations with southern African Universities, and in which several departments have a strong focus on indigenous issues, provided a useful perspective from which to further explore the patterns of indigenous education, in particular, the inter-relationships between schooling, subsistence strategies, and land rights. While based in Tromsø, I returned to southern Africa at least once a year for several weeks or months between 2007 and 2011, regularly travelling up to Nyae Nyae to follow up on developments with the Village Schools.

Together with eight southern Africans, I also attended the 8th World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPC:E), held in Melbourne, Australia in 2008.²⁰ Several of the



Fig. 5: The author with VS teacher Cwi Debe (holding her daughter) and students as they gather around a KPF project laptop in 2003 (photo by Catherine Collett, KPF)

¹⁹ The University changed its name in 2013 and is now *The Arctic University of Norway*.

²⁰ The papers presented at this conference were published in 2011 in a special issue of *Diaspora, Indigenous and Minority Education (DIME)*: Indigenous Education in southern Africa: Research and Action (5:2).

participants were San, including the Village Schools principal Cwisa Cwi. In his presentation, Cwi described the challenges facing the Village Schools (and himself, as their principal). These included problems around food and scarcity, dangerous wild animals, transportation, and problems involving the parents in the schools. He added that, “it has proven to be a great challenge to get learners from the Village Schools to continue their education in Tsumkwe.” He reported with optimism the numbers of learners at Tsumkwe school that year;²¹ however, eventually all of those students dropped out before finishing primary school. Following the conference, Cwisa and I travelled to Alice Springs together with Laurentius Davids, a native speaker of Khoekhoegowab and the Education Officer for Khoe and San Languages, at the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) in Namibia, to visit aboriginal organizations and communities to learn about their educational struggles (see Chapter 3).

In 2010, while still at the University of Tromsø, I was asked by NAMAS to lead an evaluation of their *San Education Program* in the Tsumkwe District – which includes both Nyae Nyae and Nǀa Jaqna. I formed a research team with colleagues Rodney Hopson and Willemien le Roux to conduct 10 days of fieldwork in Nyae Nyae. With ǀOma (Leon)Tsamkgao and Hanga as our interpreters and advisors, we visited every village with a school, observing classes and interviewing teachers, learners, and other community members. We also conducted interviews in Otjiwarango, Windhoek and in Norway, and scoured initial documents and background literature to produce a report identifying what we found to be the main problems, and provide recommendations (Hays, Hopson and Le Roux, 2010). We found that, although the schools were in operation, the numbers of Jul’hoan children successfully transferring to the government school in Tsumkwe were still extremely low. As in previous years even those who did manage to attend for a year or more dropped out long before receiving any kind of certificate. Nonetheless, the project itself was regarded as very important to the communities, who blamed the inability to successful transition not on the Village Schools, but on problems at the government school. The solution, from their perspective, was to expand the Village Schools – *not* to discard the model. This general finding formed the basis of our recommendations, and continues to be relevant (see also the sections below).

In 2011, I returned to spend another ten months in Namibia, this time to conduct fieldwork for my research with a Paris-based research project on indigenous rights named *Scales*

²¹ “I am very happy to report to you that for the first time in the history of the Village Schools we currently have three learners in Grade 6, six in Grade 5 and 21 in Grade 4. This might not seem very much to some of you but to my community this is a great achievement.” (Cwi 2008)

*of Governance: The UN, the States and Indigenous Peoples (SOGIP).*²² The aim of SOGIP was to examine the impact of international indigenous rights mechanisms globally, through several comparative studies; my focus was on southern Africa. I made several trips to Nyae Nyae during this period, as well as to other San communities in Namibia and Botswana. I also worked with the regional UNESCO office (based in Windhoek) to organize the conference *Indigenous Education in a Changing World*, which was held in Windhoek in June 2012 and included a strong focus on Nyae Nyae. I worked closely with the Legal Assistance Center (LAC)²³ and participated in a national survey on San living conditions, headed by the anthropologist Ute Dieckmann. The results of this study were published in 2014 in a comprehensive report entitled *Scraping the Pot: San in Namibia two decades after Independence* (Dieckmann et al. 2014). This study, which included a focus on education, as well as livelihoods, health, land rights and other issues, notes in the section on Nyae Nyae:

The Nyae Nyae Ju'hoansi are the only San population in all of southern Africa with an opportunity to have three years of schooling in their mother tongue, thanks to the Village Schools...Despite the existence of this project, education remains a deeply problematic issue for the Nyae Nyae Ju'hoansi, and few have acquired formal education certificates. [Hays, Thiem, and Jones, in Dieckmann et al. 2014:121]

This comprehensive report provides a current nationwide context in which to situate the Nyae Nyae community and their educational concerns. In the conclusion of this book I draw on this background to argue for an approach that links education with access to land and livelihood opportunities.

Recent conferences

The report from the recent nationwide study points out that “[t]he Nyae Nyae Conservancy has received an enormous amount of external support – probably more than any other San organisation in Namibia” and credits NAMAS, in particular, as a donor who has demonstrated long-term commitment (Hays et al. 2014:131). The support of NAMAS has been crucial in keeping the schools in operation since the government takeover. In the years since the 2010 report, NAMAS has strengthened its support for the Village Schools and taken a lead role in regional discussions about San education. NAMAS helped to support and participat-

²² SOGIP is based in Paris at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, and headed by Irène Bellier (European Research Council project 249236), 2010 – 2015.

²³ The Legal Assistance Center is a Windhoek-based organisation that focuses on ensuring human rights for all Namibians. They provide services, education and training on human rights issues and conduct research in several key areas. One of their sections, Land Environment and Development, includes a focus on extremely marginalized groups, including the San.

ed in the 2012 UNESCO conference in Windhoek, at which much emphasis was placed on the need to include San communities in the conversation – indeed, to take the conversation to them. NAMAS took this request seriously and in June 2014 sponsored the International San Education Conference *Ancient Wisdom, Modern Perspectives: Parent and Community Involvement in Education and Learning*, which was held in Tsumkwe and involved several parents and community members and included stakeholders from the government, NGOs, and researchers. At the meeting, the participation of Ju|'hoansi parents was emphasized, and translation between Ju|'hoansi and English was provided throughout the entire conference.

NAMAS has proven to be open to community participation, and sensitive to the importance of the role that they are filling. Their support has allowed the Village Schools to remain in operation over the past decade. But donor support is limited and ultimately it is the Nyae Nyae community who must see the project through in one way or another. Chapters 5 and 9 describe the various transitions that the project went through following the government takeover in 2004, and the period of NAMAS' activity in Tsumkwe. Despite the numerous changes over two decades, many of the problems identified at the 2014 meeting were virtually the same as those that had led to the creation of the Village Schools in the first place, and those that I had encountered over the course of my own research.

In April 2014, two initiatives with which I was closely affiliated (the project SOGIP and the Forum for Development Cooperation with Indigenous Peoples, based at the Centre for Sami Studies at the University of Tromsø) co-organized a conference on indigenous education rights. Held in Tromsø, the conference, *Education, Learning and Indigenous Peoples' Rights: What knowledge, skills and languages for sustainable livelihoods*, included education practitioners, language specialists, government officials and scholars of indigenous rights from around the world, many of whom were indigenous. The issues discussed at that conference confirmed the arguments I make in this book. In particular, indigenous participants emphasized the problematic relationship between indigenous communities and government schools in the different countries. Indigenous participants from Australia, Botswana, Bolivia, Chile, Greenland, Malaysia, and Norway described schooling as a tool for assimilation and a form of colonization, noting that formal school systems have deprived people of their traditional knowledge, emphasized writing at the expense of oral transmission of knowledge, and devalued the traditions, knowledge and values of indigenous peoples (Bellier and Hays 2016).

In my movements between the local villages of Nyae Nyae and such international discussions about indigenous rights over the years, many things have become very clear. One of them is that the experiences of the Ju|'hoansi are by no means unique – they are part of a much larger pattern. While this book is about one particular local shape this pattern

takes – and it argues for locally-focused solutions – it is important to remain aware that the structural barriers that confront hunter-gatherers and other indigenous peoples in formal education systems are intimately connected to the historical patterns of colonialism as well as current global forces that are moving the world towards an uncertain future.

The Nyae Nyae community

The timeline on page 92 provides a visual image of the various role-players that have been involved with the Village Schools over the past 25 years. Some of the outside individuals and organizations have invested enormous energy, time, and financial support in education in the Nyae Nyae area, over long periods of time. As the timeline illustrates, however, there have been stages of significant change and a high turnover of individuals involved. What I try to illustrate in the timeline, and emphasize in this book, is the obvious but easy-to-overlook fact that the most consistent ‘stakeholders’ in the Village Schools are, of course, the Nyae Nyae community. They are the ones that have been there all along, experiencing the changes – and recognizing those conditions that never seem to change. They do not fly back to the US or Norway, or Cape Town or Johannesburg, or drive to Otjiwarango or Windhoek when their job is finished – they stay in their community and they “keep trying with education.” The Nyae Nyae community members are, in all senses of the word, the “owners” of their individual and cultural learning processes.

2 The Nyae Nyae Ju|'hoansi

The great advance for these Bushmen [will be] in their recognition of personal property. That is the basis of all civilization.

[Claude McIntyre, Secretary of the Schoeman Commission, quoted in Gordon and Sholto-Douglas 2000:175]

There are sound historical and environmental reasons why Jul'hoan society had long remained stable as a collection of decentralized, but carefully articulated small groups with controlled relationships to land and resources. The reasons why the society is experiencing social and economic dislocation now, I suggest, are equally sound: they are the predictable results of too-rapid change from a deeply socialized human pattern, without benefit of effective re-socialization or data-based resources planning. [Biesele 1995:5]

The Village Schools, and educational issues in Nyae Nyae cannot be understood outside of the regional and local historical context. Particularly important is recognition of their recent past as hunters and gatherers, and the dramatic changes that the Nyae Nyae community has experienced over the past several decades as they were forced to adjust to the

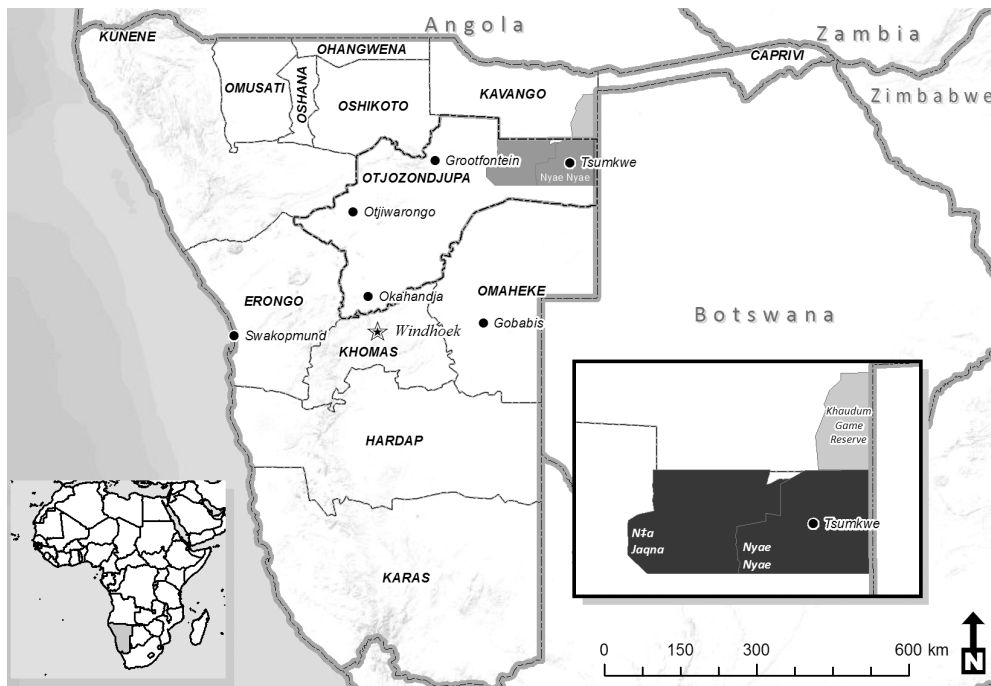


Fig. 6: Map of Nyae Nyae in Namibia (credit Stefan Chapkanski, 2015)

the same cultural group at least 4,000 years ago (Smith 2001). Ethnically, linguistically, genetically and culturally distinct from their Bantu neighbors, the Ju'hoansi of Nyae Nyae were living primarily as hunters and gatherers up to the middle of the 20th century.¹

What is now called the Nyae Nyae region is a fraction of an area that the Ju'hoansi once occupied in the northern Kalahari Desert, estimated to be over 70,000 sq km (Marshall and Ritchie n.d.). Approximately 1,200 Ju'hoansi San living in this area were divided into smaller bands, who followed the seasonal availability of wild animals and wild plant resources. The Ju'hoansi maintained a small-scale, egalitarian social structure, with land-use patterns organized around territories called *n!oresi* (singular *n!ore*), composed of family-based units (see map of *n!ores*, p. 23). The right to reside in and use the resources of these territories was inherited, and each *n!ore* was collectively owned by a small group of people, usually siblings, one of whom was commonly identified as the *n!orekxao*. Sometimes translated as “owner”, the role was in fact primarily one of stewardship or of “guardianship but not exclusive authority over the resources of the *n!ore*” (Bieseke and Hitchcock 2011:54). Permission to hunt and gather on another group's *n!ore* had to be gained from the *n!orekxao*; it was usually granted – though this depended on the closeness of the relationship between the groups (Lee 1979). Resources were shared according to specific patterns, depending upon the nature of the item and upon social relationships (Lee 2013; Wiessner 2002). The survival of each group, and the individuals within them, depended upon their relationships with other bands; extensive social networks based on kinship, marriage, as well as mutual agreement and friendship, were carefully cultivated and maintained (Marshall 1976). The strong egalitarian ethic that characterizes relations between individuals and groups was emphasized by early ethnographers, and recognized as integral to their survival strategy.

Change comes to the Ju'hoansi of Nyae Nyae

The work of the Marshall family, beginning in the early 1950s, provides a great deal of insight into the lives of the Nyae Nyae Ju'hoansi prior to the rapid systematic reduction

¹ The famous Kalahari Debate, which revolves around the question of whether the San in the Kalahari contacted by the early researchers lived as relatively isolated, autonomous groups before contact with outsiders in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, or whether they had been in subservient relationships with outsiders since the time of the Bantu migrations to the South a millennium or two ago. This has been thoroughly debated in the literature (Wilmsen 1989; Solway and Lee 1990; Lee and Guenther 1991) and the general consensus is that San communities and individuals occupied a variety of environmental and social niches long before European contact, and that they continue to do so (Lee and Hitchcock 1998; Gordon and Sholto-Douglas 2000; Guenther 1999). Genetic, historical and oral-historical evidence all support the time estimates given in the text for the Ju'hoansi of Nyae Nyae.

of their land base that began soon after the earliest visits of the Marshalls (Thomas 1959; Marshall 1976, 1999; Marshall 2002). The work of the Harvard Kalahari Research Project (1963–1976) with Ju'hoansi in Namibia and across the border in Botswana² provides a base of comparison and background to the current situation of the Nyae Nyae Ju'hoansi today (including Lee and DeVore 1976; Lee 1979, 1984, 2013; Howell 1979, 2010; Konner 1976; Wiessner 1977; Bieseke 1993b; Draper 1972, 1975, 1978; Shostack 1981; Katz 1982). According to this body of research, during the 1950s–1960s, the Ju'hoansi in Namibia and Botswana acquired virtually all of their food through hunting and gathering – with the majority (70–80%) supplied by gathering (Lee 1976; Marshall 1976).

1950s – Schoeman Commission establishes a reserve for the “!Kung”

Even as the Marshalls were documenting the way of life at Nyae Nyae, processes were underway that would ultimately drastically change it. In 1949, the two-man “Commission for the Preservation of the Bushmen” was established. Chaired by P.J. Schoeman, an author of popular books about “Bushmen,” the commission was tasked with finding a solution for the reported mass decline in the San population of Namibia. Schoeman asked himself whether the “Bushmen” would be able to adapt to modern life, and answered his own question thus:

Judging by their historical past, the one and only answer would be: No...The Bushmen seem to lack something, some inner or spiritual ability. [Schoeman, n.d., in Gordon and Sholto-Douglas 2000:164]

The “Bushmen” were perceived to be rapidly dying out in the face of increasingly intense contact with other groups, with whom they could not compete, and whose ways they were incapable of adopting. The final report of the “Bushman Commission,” as The Schoeman Commission was known, requested a reserve for the “!Kung,” who were considered to still be “wild pure bushmen” in order protect them from the “very grave danger of extinction.”³ The initial location suggested for the reserve was changed when that area was deemed useful for European ranchers. The Nyae Nyae area, further east, was considered

² The situation for the Ju'hoansi in Botswana is different from Namibia; the political and social dynamics have evolved differently. However, movement across the border has continued and many people have relations on ‘the other side’. Anthropological studies conducted there are relevant to Nyae Nyae Ju'hoansi; though it is important to remember that access to resources, political organisation and relations with neighbors, among other things, differ between the two Ju'hoansi populations today.

³ An interim report in September 1951, recommending that two “Bushman Reserves” be set up, one for the “Khaung” (!Xun), and one for the “Heikom,” (Hai||om), but the latter was dropped, largely because of the perception that the Hai||om were not “pure” Bushmen (Gordon and Sholto-Douglas 2000).

unsuitable for cattle farming and agriculture, and better suited for the Ju'hoansi hunting and gathering way of life, and this was the area designated for the reserve (Gordon and Sholto-Douglas 2000).

The establishment of a reserve was followed by the construction of an administrative camp in 1959; built upon a former *n!ore* called *Tjum!kui* ('poison arrows'⁴ in Ju'hoansi; Bieseles personal communication), or Tsumkwe, as it came to be known in the European languages. Under the Bantu Administration Act of 1953, the Ju'hoansi had become the responsibility of the Department of Bantu Administration in (then) South West Africa, and the establishment of the office of Bushman Affairs Commissioner in 1960 marked the official beginning of government administration of the Nyae Nyae area. The former secretary of the Schoeman Commission, Claude McIntyre, was the first to hold his office. Although the initial logic behind the establishment of the reserve was based largely on the intent to maintain the purity of a race deemed unable to participate in modern society, efforts to incorporate them into the cash economy quickly surfaced in McIntyre's approach, as reflected in the quote at the beginning of this chapter. The Ju'hoansi were given a parcel of land that agriculturalists had deemed unusable, and then told that the land was "very valuable for farming purposes" and that they were expected to use the land "properly" – i.e. for farming (in Gordon and Sholto-Douglas 2000:175). The administrative center of Tsumkwe became a town, whose main purpose was "to be a location of permanent and sedentary resettlement for the Ju'hoansi, a way of incorporating them into modern life" (Bieseles and Hitchcock 2011:9).

The impact of all of these events on the formerly self-sufficient San was enormous. Gordon and Sholto-Douglas describe the penetration of the contemporary cash economy into Tsumkwe as "swift, and its consequences far-reaching" (2000:176). Following the restriction of their traditional territory, in 1961 the Dutch Reformed Church erected a small trade store, reinforcing the need for cash in order to obtain food as hunting and gathering options were reduced – thus beginning a cycle of dependency from which the Nyae Nyae Ju'hoansi have still not managed to free themselves. The position of Bushman affairs commissioner was a "revolving door" filled by people without the appropriate skills and experience. As people began to move from their *n!oresi* to Tsumkwe to experience the supposed benefits of life there, the need for cash and access to food steadily increased. But the implementation of small projects proved to be difficult; it was "easier simply to dole out rations and welfare for 'needy' cases." Gordon and Sholto-Douglas classify the resulting approach under Jeremy Beckett's "welfare colonialism" (*ibid.*).

⁴ The Ju'hoansi apply a hemotoxic poison made from the crushed larvae of a local beetle to the tips of their arrows when hunting.

Thus, early efforts to incorporate the Ju'hoansi into the state and economy were characterized by inconsistency in approach and goals on the part of powerful outsiders, unrealistic expectations, and a total lack of consideration as to what the Ju'hoansi themselves wanted. They were labeled as “backwards” and incapable of adapting, and simultaneously expected to adapt with far fewer resources, worse land, and a host of other disadvantages. There was no recognition of the validity or value of their skills or consideration of what might be viable economic options in the region. For a people in transition and living on the margins of survival, these contradictions seriously undermined any efforts to establish or maintain a reliable and sustainable food source, or to develop balanced relationships with the other, more powerful, groups that now encroached upon every aspect of their lives.

1970s – Odendaal Commission establishes “Bushmanland”

The Odendaal Commission was set up in 1964 to produce a plan for separate development in Namibia (then South West Africa), based on the extension of apartheid throughout the territory. The homeland “Bushmanland” was created as a magisterial district under the Odendaal Commission in 1970 when approximately 15,500 sq km (1,800,000 hectares) of land was defined and designated as a homeland for San in Namibia in 1976. At that time, a few hundred Ju'hoansi were the main inhabitants of the area; residing mostly in the eastern part where there were permanent water sources.

The establishment of homelands had devastating effects on the San across the country. Most suddenly found themselves incorporated into the ethnic homelands of other groups, even if the land they had been previously living on was their own ancestral land. The Ju'hoansi of Nyae Nyae were the most fortunate of the San – they got a “homeland” on their ancestral territory. But this land was only a fraction of their previous territories – a dispossession. The creation of a 59,000 sq km reserve for the Herero, beginning immediately to the south of Bushmanland, posed a serious threat to the San lands (Gordon and Sholto-Douglas 2000:173, 222; see also Bieseke and Hitchcock 2011).

In 1978, the South West African Army (SWAA), with the South African Defense Force (SADF), established a military camp in Tsumkwe and began recruiting Ju'hoansi as soldiers in the war against the South-West Africa Peoples' Organization (SWAPO) – the independence movement fighting South African colonization.⁵ They also established a base at Man-

⁵ The Ju'hoansi were one of three San groups associated with the SADF. The other two were the Khwe of Caprivi, Angola, Zambia and Botswana and the !Xun from northern Namibia (formerly from Angola). Many !Xun and Khwe soldiers and their families later relocated to South Africa, but the Ju'hoansi did not, due to their open association with the SWAPO political party during the first elections following independence, and their relative autonomy in what was then Bushmanland (Le Roux and White 2005).

getti Duin, in the western part of the district, known as “West Bushmanland.” There, the SADF resettled soldiers (and their families) from two other San groups from northern Namibia and Angola, the !Xun and Khwe. Most of the Ju!’hoansi stayed in “East Bushmanland” but some Ju!’hoansi villages were on the ‘West’ side. Relations between the different San groups are said to have been “generally positive” (Bieseles and Hitchcock 2011:36). It is important to note, however, that three San groups with different languages, cultures, kinship networks and histories were lumped together as “Bushmen,” as if they were a single ethnic group. This is a misunderstanding that can still be problematic today.

Throughout the 1980s, the SADF employment of 700 Ju!’hoansi⁶ injected cash into the Nyae Nyae economy in the form of relatively enormous salaries, further skewing the community’s economic relationships among individuals and between family groups, as well as the process of integration into the cash economy. Lee notes that, while military engagements were infrequent, “far more destructive was the sudden wealth in the hands of so many young men away from their families” (2006:152). He calls this “a gigantic experiment in forced social change” – a process that he notes is still ongoing today (Lee 2013:216).

1980s – Nyae Nyae declared a game reserve

In the early 1980s, the Department of Nature Conservation indicated that they intended to turn Bushmanland into a game reserve. Fearing that this would limit their options to becoming objects of tourism, like the game animals in the area, the Ju!’hoansi and their supporters vigorously resisted what John Marshall referred to as a “Plastic Stone Age” (quoted in Lee 2006:152) in 1984, and with the assistance of the newly formed Cattle Fund⁷ and the Kalahari Peoples Fund (KPF)⁸ a “back to the *n!oresi*” movement encouraged people to move away from Tsumkwe, back to lands that the Ju!’hoansi had previously occupied (Bieseles and Hitchcock 2011; Wiessner 2004). However, this could no longer be a full return to a hunting and gathering lifestyle, for much had changed:

In the 1960s when the Ju!’hoansi moved to Tjum!kui to seek a better future, their hunting and gathering way of life came to an end. Its fate was sealed with the establishment of the Kaudum game reserve to the north and the allocation of the Glam area to the south to the Herero, dispossessing the Ju!’hoansi of the richest two thirds of their former lands. By the time the Ju!’hoansi had resettled on their traditional lands during the early 1980s, they were 20 years removed from a mobile foraging

⁶ Lee points out that they were “one of the most heavily militarized peoples in Africa” (2006:152).

⁷ Initiated in 1981 by John Marshall and Claire Richie and funded by the Marshall Family, it later became the Ju!’wa Bushman Development Foundation (JBDF) and then the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia (NNDNF).

⁸ Founded in 1973 by Megan Bieseles and other anthropologists of the Harvard Kalahari Research Group.

life. They could, or would, no longer maintain the seasonal rounds and visiting patterns that were so crucial to their former existence. [Wiessner 2004:150]

The goal of the move was for the Ju'hoansi to re-establish themselves as independent units, employing a mixed production system of foraging, pastoralism, agriculture, and small-scale rural entrepreneurial activities to sustain themselves (Hitchcock and Bieseke 1999). The Cattle Fund money was used as a start-up fund for people to purchase cattle, seeds and farming implements, and later helped to drill boreholes for the Ju'hoansi to use. Efforts by the government's Department of Nature Conservation to increase wildlife populations in the area also included the drilling of boreholes – for elephants. This contributed to a dramatic increase in the elephant population of the area; an increase in lions was also reported. Efforts by the Ju'hoansi to supplement their subsistence options with agriculture were frequently thwarted by these animals (elephants today can still create enormous problems for Nyae Nyae residents).

1990s – Independence and the Nyae Nyae Conservancy

The *Ju|Wa Farmers Union* was initially conceived as a community based organization (CBO), owned and controlled by the Ju'hoansi themselves, and was later formalized as the *Nyae Nyae Farmers Cooperative* (NNFC) with elected representatives to advocate for the interests of the Nyae Nyae Ju'hoansi in broader political and other contexts. As Namibia moved towards independence in 1990, this organization attracted the attention of international donors, and increasing amounts of funding became available. The NNFC, with the help of supporters, was able to effectively organize their participation in the Conference on Land Reform and the Land Question, held in 1991. The conference “provided the Ju'hoansi and other minority people an unparalleled chance to have their voices heard on the specific topic of alternative land use models” (Bieseke and Hitchcock 2011:41). Largely as a result of the participation of the Ju'hoansi in this conference, the Nyae Nyae area became a pilot for a national project in land-use planning based on community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) and, in 1998, the Nyae Nyae area became the first official conservancy established by the independent nation of Namibia.

Conservancies, an integral part of Namibia's CBNRM program, are areas of communal land where communities have some control over natural resource management and utilization. Although wildlife and tourism are usually the main focus, conservancies also often focus on other resources, such as water points or woodlands, and on addressing social and economic issues. The Nyae Nyae Conservancy today covers an area of approximately 9,000 sq km. Tsumkwe is the administrative and economic center of the Nyae Nyae area

and the Conservancy headquarters.⁹ The clinic, government schools, all government offices, churches, and all of the shops within the Nyae Nyae area are located in Tsumkwe. The Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia (NNDNF), based in Windhoek, is the current version of the Ju|'wa Bushman Development Foundation. They provide support to the Nyae Nyae Conservancy (NNC) in the form of securing donor funding and working towards economic self-sufficiency and capacity building in several key areas, especially natural resource management.

In 2014, the Nyae Nyae Conservancy included 1375 registered members over the age of 18; NNDNF doubles that figure for the total number of community members, for a total Ju|'hoansi population estimate of about 2750.¹⁰ There are between 30 and 35 smaller villages, in which most of the Ju|'hoansi population in the area have a base. Exact figures for how



Fig. 8: The children of Ju|'hoansi trackers with skulls of elephants killed by professional hunters, at a hunting camp in 2009

⁹ The Conservancy headquarters was initially based in the village of Baraka, 35 km to the east of Tsumkwe. For various reasons it was shifted to Tsumkwe in 2003.

¹⁰ Lara Diez, (personal communication 29.10.14). At the time of my extended fieldwork in 2001–2002 (a few years after the conservancy was declared), there were 770 registered adult members. These were estimated by NNDNF to represent approximately 2000 San people within the Nyae Nyae area; they included about 1500 in the 30–35 villages and about 500 in the town, which was estimated to have a total population of about 1000. There is still a fair amount of mobility among villages and between villages and Tsumkwe, and sometimes entire villages will move or disperse. During the time I was there, a gradual move towards Tsumkwe was in process,

many Ju'hoansi live in the town of Tsumkwe are difficult to establish, largely because of the difficulty defining who is a "resident" and who is a "visitor." Almost all of the Ju'hoansi living in Tsumkwe also have a base in at least one *n!ore*, and there is constant movement between village and town depending upon availability of bush foods and other economic and social factors.

Although access to Conservancy land is limited to Conservancy members – almost all of whom are Ju'hoansi – anyone is allowed to settle within a five km radius of Tsumkwe town, which had a population of around 1500 in 2012, roughly half of whom are non-Ju'hoansi. Lee estimated that there were approximately 500–800 Ju'hoansi in Tsumkwe in 2010 (2013:218). Although almost all of the *village* residents in the Conservancy are Ju'hoansi (the few that are not are related by marriage), and the dominant population of the area is the Ju'hoansi, there are a variety of ethnic groups in Tsumkwe town and, at the time of the most recent survey in 2012, almost all positions associated with political influence and income were occupied by non-Ju'hoansi (see Hays et al. 2014).

One important benefit of the Nyae Nyae Conservancy is the quota of big game animals that Conservancy members are allowed to kill (or sell the rights to kill) each year. The Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) determines this quota, based on calculations of sustainable wildlife management. The Ministry decides which, and how many, animals can be sold for trophy hunting, and which can be hunted for what is called "own use hunting" (using traditional bow and arrow methods only; hunting with guns is not allowed). Trophy hunters employ some Ju'hoansi as trackers; this income supports them and their extended families. Meat from trophy kills is distributed on a rotational basis, benefiting all villages within the Conservancy. In addition, the substantial amounts paid by the trophy hunters allow for the redistribution of funds to conservancy members in the form of a cash benefit (Hays et al. 2014). Trophy hunting thus benefits Conservancy members in many ways; this and other subsistence options will be further discussed in the sections below.

Neighboring groups

After Independence, Bushmanland became Tsumkwe District, which today is within the Otjozondjupa Region (see fig. 6). The previous division has been retained; today the two subdistricts are referred to as Tsumkwe East and Tsumkwe West. The East is largely contiguous with the Nyae Nyae Conservancy and still inhabited primarily by Ju'hoansi descended from the original inhabitants of the area. Most of Tsumkwe West is within the Nǀa Jaqna

and Wiessner (2004) reports that approximately 15% of the population of the villages relocated to Tsumkwe by July 2002. This was not an ongoing trend, but rather part of a fluctuating cycle depending primarily on the availability of resources.

Conservancy, home to a mix of !Xun from other parts of Namibia (including many whose ancestors lived in the Omatako Valley), and some former residents of Angola, as well as some Khwe, in far smaller numbers. Although the !Xun and Jul'hoansi languages are closely related, they are not fully mutually intelligible (Miller-Ockhuizen and Sands 1999). They are different groups with different historical experiences and different experiences of assimilation into mainstream society. The Khwe language is only distantly related to the other two.

Many of the problems that the Nyae Nyae Jul'hoansi confront are shared by the San in Nǃa Jaqna, and there is movement between the two conservancies. Some villages, such as Grashoek, are mostly Jul'hoansi and have relationships with those in the Nyae Nyae Conservancy. There are several primary schools in that district, including Grashoek and Aasvoëlnes, which also has a high population of Jul'hoansi. The latter is located just to the west of the NNC boundary, and Jul'hoansi students from Nyae Nyae sometimes choose to attend that school. In addition, all students from the schools in Tsumkwe West attend Tsumkwe School for schooling past Grade 7.

On the whole, however, the populations of Nǃa Jaqna and Nyae Nyae (or Tsumkwe West and Tsumkwe East) are generally distinct, and confront different dynamics on the local level. This book concentrates almost entirely upon the dynamics in Nyae Nyae, or Tsumkwe East, although reference will be made to Nǃa Jaqna and to villages there. Unfortunately, one thing that San residents in both Tsumkwe East and West share is the threat of neighboring groups and others who want to access their land – despite the fact that their Conservancy status grants them clear rights to land use and resources, according to Namibian law. In Tsumkwe West, Nǃa Jaqna Conservancy successfully resisted¹¹ efforts on the part of the government to regazette parts of their land for smallhold farmers. However, illegal fencing of plots by non-conservancy members continues with little action taken by the government and is still a major problem. The section below briefly describes a current threat to their land base that the Jul'hoansi in Nyae Nyae Conservancy are battling, from their neighbors to the south.

Pastoralist invasions

Despite the strong legal rights to the land in the Conservancy, the Jul'hoansi – like San throughout the country – face regular threats of incursion by neighbors who want to use the land for other purposes. Particularly problematic are neighboring pastoralists who wish to use the Conservancy as grazing land for their cattle. The most recent invasion in Nyae Nyae was in 2009 when a group of Herero farmers from the conservancy to the south, Gam, cut

¹¹ With the support of the Legal Assistance Center (LAC) and NAMAS.

the Veterinary Cordon Fence – commonly referred to as the “Red Line” – that separates Nyae Nyae from the Conservancy to the south, and invaded Nyae Nyae with over 1000 cattle. The government confiscated the cattle;¹² however, rather than simply return to Glam, the Herero farmers settled in Tsumkwe. They sued the government and were repaid for the cattle that were confiscated. Over the last few years, they are reported to be amassing cattle, intimidating Ju’hoan residents, and illegally using conservancy resources such as grass and water for their cattle and wood for fencing.

In 2013, the Nyae Nyae Conservancy became a gazetted Community Forest under Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF) legislation. This status gives the conservancy members rights over the forest products (plants) and grazing resources (in addition to the rights to wildlife resources provided by conservancy status); it also increases the community’s control of forest resources. This status should provide additional legal protection against external exploitation (Hays et al. 2014:98). It is not yet clear whether this legislation will be useful for protecting the San from encroachment on their lands.

Growing immigration of pastoralists and their cattle into the area has already begun damaging the fragile environment around Tsumkwe. If the number of cattle continues to rise, it will jeopardize the sustainable resource-use plan that the conservancy has put in place, ultimately threatening all of the programs. As the (then) chairman of the Conservancy, !Angn!ao !’Un “Kiewiet”, told Bieseke, if the cattle farmers stay in Nyae Nyae, the subsistence options of the Nyae Nyae Ju’hoansi will be severely threatened:

We have people who make ostrich-eggshell beadwork, and sell it. And we have people who dig kamaku roots and sell them. It’s a business of ours, and as I now see it...if the Gam farmers still stay with us here, it will die. There will be no hunting...foreigners who came here from other lands to hunt will stop coming... The government will take away our hunting, and we will have nothing else we can do.

... We are people who walk about on the land. We look for things like *ca*, *chon*, ||*xaru*, [root bushfoods that grow in the sand] and *kamaku*; we live from these things. And if there are a lot of cattle here, we won’t see those things again. We won’t see them again. Their stalks will be pressed down and killed [by the cattle’s hooves] and there will be nothing we can do about it. (27 June 2009¹³)

The perception by other groups in Namibia that the Ju’hoansi and other San “do not use the land” because they do not practice large scale herding or agriculture makes them more vulnerable to invasion. However, as the quote above indicates, the Ju’hoansi of Nyae Nyae are

¹² The fence separates certified disease-free cattle in the south from the (potentially) infected areas to the north, and is critical for the export of beef from Namibia to the EU. Because of this, the cattle could not simply be driven back.

¹³ Interview conducted in Ju’hoansi and translated to English by Bieseke.

currently managing flexible and varied income-generation and subsistence livelihood strategies. Although they have far more options than many San in Namibia, most of these are highly vulnerable and can be quickly undermined by changes in legal standing, or a failure to enforce existing legislation when neighboring groups or others violate their land rights.

Subsistence options in Nyae Nyae

As l'Un emphatically states in the quote above, hunting and gathering is still a vital part of the subsistence economy in Nyae Nyae. Many recent studies and reports (Bieseles and Hitchcock 2011; Lee 2013; Dieckmann et al. 2014) have pointed out this important benefit that the Conservancy has provided for its members. The ability to practice traditional subsistence methods, has in turn been linked to better health, greater access to food, and general overall well-being. Without the ability to move around freely, however, and with the current population density, it is no longer an option for Nyae Nyae residents to survive solely from hunting and gathering. Food is sometimes provided by the government, donated by organi-



Fig. 9: In Makuri Village a harvest of Kamaku, or “Devil’s claw” dries on suspended netting. A medicinal plant root used to treat arthritis and exported to the European market, this gathered crop is one of the most important sources of cash income



Fig. 10: Residents of ||Xa||oba Village lead visiting tourists on a walk into the surrounding bush. Villagers have changed into their traditional attire to show people how they used to dress, as a part of the “Living Hunters Muesum” tourism venture

zations or by individuals such as tourists and researchers, or traded for crafts. Sometimes it is purchased with the scant income from a variety of sources, including tourism, the sale of gathered plants, organized gathering projects, craft sales, and begging.

The conservancy itself generates income, through hunting concessions as described above, as well as through other forms of tourism and filming and recording fees. A substantial portion of this income is divided among all conservancy members and distributed at the end of the year.¹⁴ A large portion is also used for salaries. In 2012, 23 people were employed by the conservancy itself and received modest salaries (Hays et al. 2014). A few other individuals have jobs with the government, are employed by local businesses or take on temporary jobs. Employment opportunities are scarce, mostly insecure and poorly paid, and organized income generation schemes (such as craft-production) and other attempts at providing a sustainable livelihood (such as agriculture projects) have mostly proved difficult to maintain (see Wiessner 2004 for a breakdown of figures). One notable exception may be the harvesting of devils’ claw,¹⁵ which in 2010 and 2011 was frequently cited as a source of income by Ju’hoansi and is ongoing at the time of publication. As collection of devils’ claw

¹⁴ For several years, this has been N\$ 400 per person, about US\$ 35 at the time of writing.

¹⁵ A root plant sold as an herbal medicine, used mainly to treat arthritis. Harvesters receive N\$700 (about \$60) for a bag, which takes them between 1 and 1.5 months to collect (Hays et al. 2014).

can take place over several weeks in areas far from the villages, people often temporarily relocate for the harvesting period.

A few villages have also implemented small-scale tourism projects that have provided income and contributed to a positive self-image of inhabitants. One particularly successful example is that of ||Xa|oba village, whose inhabitants have developed a “Living Hunters Museum” in which they perform their traditional and current activities for tourists. This project was initiated and is controlled by the community,¹⁶ and provides a small but useful income for participating individuals as well as general funds for the village that are used for communal needs and projects (see also Chapters 9 and 11).

By the time of my extended fieldwork in 2002, virtually all Ju’hoansi had become dependent to at least some extent upon store-bought foods.¹⁷ This was confirmed by fieldwork



Fig. 11: A young woman shows some mopane worms she has gathered in the southeastern part of Nyae Nyae, in 2002

in 2011 for the regional survey (Dieckmann et al. 2014). The most important sources of food identified in 2011 were government food aid (mostly maize meal), old age pensions (used mainly to purchase food) and, importantly, *veld* food – the Afrikaans-based term often used in southern Africa for food that is obtained directly from the land. Supplementary livelihood strategies described include hunting, earning cash through the collection of devil’s claw, selling crafts and other tourism activities, piecework (getting paid to do specific tasks on a once-off basis; this is reported primarily by Tsumkwe residents), small-scale cultivation or livestock farming, and occasionally regular employment. The conservancy cash benefit was also mentioned everywhere as an important source of additional income, and meat from trophy hunters’ kills provided an important source of food. It should also be noted that,

¹⁶ This project is supported by the Living Culture Foundation, who provide some training, advice, and signs for visitors to find the village. They do not provide financial support, and the community must be the ones who initiate the project and who have responsibility for managing the finances. Information found at <http://www.lcfn.info/>

¹⁷ Maize meal, tea, sugar and oil are staples; bread (or wheat flour), pasta, rice, dried beans, and tins of fish are enjoyed when they can be obtained (Hays et al. 2014).



Fig. 12: Women in the village of N!om\om Village making ostrich eggshell beads, which they will use to make necklaces and other crafts to sell. Crafts are one of the most important sources of cash income, especially for women

at all survey sites in Nyae Nyae, the sharing of resources was described as an important resource-distribution strategy (Hays et al. 2014). The residents of Nyae Nyae were thus relying on a variety of livelihood strategies, which allowed them to remain flexible in the face of harsh environmental, social and economic circumstances.

None of these sources of cash or food mentioned above is consistent or stable – except perhaps the regular salaries of the few wage jobs (although as we shall see in Chapter 7 even these could be problematic) – and there are periods of extreme hunger. Not surprisingly, access to food is a major preoccupation for most Ju'hoansi. The immediate need to secure access to food thus often takes priority when choices between short-term gain and long-term planning must be made (see Chapter 10 for a more extended discussion of short term vs. long term planning). The priority placed on food, and the need to be prepared to engage in a variety of subsistence strategies, all have enormous bearing upon the success of any education effort in Tsumkwe – emphasizing and illustrating this is an important focus of this book.

Schools, language and education in Tsumkwe District

Tsumkwe town is the educational center for all of Tsumkwe District and some surrounding areas. Although there are several primary schools in other villages within Nyae Nyae, Nṭa Jaqna and |Gam (to the south), these only go up to Grades 3, 4, 5 or, sometimes, 7. Thus in addition to students coming from the Village Schools and children living in Tsumkwe, the primary and secondary schools in Tsumkwe also cater for students from other parts of the district who wish to continue their schooling beyond the grade available in their home villages. In addition, kids from towns further away such as Grootfontein and Rundu may also come to Tsumkwe for secondary school.¹⁸ As a result, the population of both the Tsumkwe Primary and Tsumkwe Secondary schools is primarily *not* Ju'hoansi. Many students at Tsumkwe school come from places too far to travel to and from on a daily basis; these students live in the school hostels.

At the time of my fieldwork in 2001– 2002, TJSS was a bare concrete structure that included classrooms and dormitory rooms, surrounded by a high fence. All but one of the teachers at TJSS were from a non-San ethnic group; for the first time in 2001 there was one Ju'hoan teacher at the school, see below). Many of the students were boarders who were locked in the schoolyard for all but a few hours of the day. The school went from Grade 1 up to Grade 10. Government schools are normally separated into primary schools (Grades 1–7), Junior Secondary Schools (Grades 8–10), and Senior Secondary Schools (Grades 11–12). The School in Tsumkwe was called a “Junior Secondary School” because it went up to Grade 10, but it was also a primary school. Although the younger students were separated somewhat from the older ones in the school and hostel, they shared the same grounds and general premises. It was unusual for these levels to be combined, and many Ju'hoan parents complained about it, saying that the older students abused the younger ones; many wanted the primary school to be separate.

In 2009, additional buildings were constructed with funding and labor provided by the Chinese government.¹⁹ The Primary School was separated from the Secondary School and became *Tsumkwe Primary School* (TPS). In 2011, Grades 11 and 12 were added and the other school became *Tsumkwe Senior Secondary School* (TSSS). Although this situation is preferable, it has not solved the problems that existed previously; there are still numerous complaints about abuse, theft, food, and other problems at the schools and hostels. Although

¹⁸ At various points during my fieldwork, including during the 2010 evaluation for NAMAS, it was said that students who were ‘troublemakers’ – who had been expelled from other schools – were sent to Tsumkwe. School officials have confirmed that this has sometimes been the practice.

¹⁹ The Chinese government invests heavily in development in Namibia, schools (and roads) are particular areas to which funding is dedicated.

food is provided at the school, students often complain that they do not get enough to eat, or about the quality of the food (these complaints can be quite serious; see chapter 8). Other problems reported over the years by Ju'hoansi children living at the hostels in Tsumkwe include theft of personal property, lack of understanding on the part of the hostel matrons, and physical and emotional abuse from other students and teachers, including sexual abuse. Members of various ethnic groups have served as principal of the school, but no Ju'hoansi or other San person has ever filled this position. Although the individuals involved at the school have varied, relations between the school and the community have been strained during all of the periods that I conducted research in Nyae Nyae.

Language

By far the most common language spoken in the Nyae Nyae area is Ju'hoansi, which is the home language of virtually all of the Nyae Nyae Conservancy members and their families. Many of the older Ju'hoan men (and a few women) also speak Afrikaans as the result of their involvement with the SADF in the 1970s–1980s. Afrikaans was the language of instruction at the government schools until 1990, and young adults who were in school during the late 1980s learned Afrikaans. Though Afrikaans is still taught as a subject, it is not a language in which education or literacy is being promoted by the Namibian government, other than for mother-tongue speakers. In recent years, however, it has been reported that the language Afrikaans is used by some teachers as a language of instruction at the Tsumkwe schools (Hays et al. 2010). Other non-San languages commonly spoken in Tsumkwe include Otjiherero, Rukavango, Rukwangali, Otjiwambo, Setswana, and Nama/Damara, though these are not languages in which literacy is being promoted in the Nyae Nyae Conservancy. There are some !Xun speakers, and efforts are underway to develop the !Xun language for education in Nǀa Jaqna, where most Namibian speakers of !Xun reside today (see Chapter 6).

Since Independence in 1990, the language of instruction at government schools from Grade 4 onwards has been English, the official language of Namibia. Mother-tongue education is promoted for the first three years, and the Ministry of Education has created educational materials in most of the country's languages, including Ju'hoansi. Nonetheless, the language of instruction at the Tsumkwe School today is English from Grade 1. In 2001, a Ju'hoan teacher taught one Grade 4 class, using the standard English curriculum, with one added section of Ju'hoansi language as a subject. Although this practice was promoted and tried at various points, it has not been consistent, primarily due to lack of qualified Ju'hoan teachers (a problem that is a conundrum for government and organizations working in the area; see Chapter 7). Adult literacy is promoted in both English and Ju'hoansi (although

attendance is reported to be an ongoing problem). The Nyae Nyae Ju'l'hoansi express virtually universal agreement that both English and Ju'l'hoansi are important languages for their community.

The Village Schools

As described in the introduction, the Nyae Nyae VSP was begun in the early 1990s in response to the extremely low rate of Ju'l'hoan participation in the government schools. The project consists of small schools located in villages within the conservancy (see fig. 22., p. 98). The original teachers were from the Nyae Nyae community and taught in Ju'l'hoansi. The emphasis was on mother-tongue education, community involvement and the inclusion of the students' culture and cultural activities in the curriculum. A parallel focus was on preparing children to enter the government schools in Grade 4 as confident learners with critical thinking skills. With the dual goals of both validating local culture and language *and* increasing access to skills required to participate in local and national economic and political life, the concept of the project has appealed to a variety of stakeholders, including San communities themselves, and it has attracted a lot of attention over the past two decades. Following chapters take an in-depth look at the project, its goals, and the contradictions with which it has grappled. Crucial to an understanding of these dynamics, however, is a recognition of the social impact of the dramatic and rapid changes that the Ju'l'hoansi have confronted over the past decades.

A major transition

The Ju'l'hoansi of the Nyae Nyae Conservancy are considered to be privileged by San in other parts of southern Africa, and by many others familiar with the situation in the region. They still have access to land, and thus the right and ability to practice some of their traditional ways. They have the Village Schools, which provide mother tongue education. A great deal of money and time has been invested by international donors, researchers, local and regional NGOs, and the Namibian government has been invested in improving access to education, income generation, and other development projects in the area over the past few decades.

Namibia's Traditional Authorities Act (2000) allows a community to designate one person to be the leader of a Traditional Council.²⁰ This Unit – the leader and the council

²⁰ These are then approved by the Prime Minister. "The community" is – according to the Act – understood to be an entity sharing a common language, culture and heritage. To be a part of a community one has to a) self-identify and b) be accepted by the rest of the community. Traditional

– are the Traditional Authority (TA). There are five San communities whose Traditional Authority has been recognized by the Namibian government; the Nyae Nyae Community is one, and has had a functioning TA structure since 1998. Chief Tsamkxao ǀOma (popularly known as “Chief Bobo”) is recognized as legitimate by both the Namibian government and the Nyae Nyae community. Some notable San political figures have been Ju!’hoansi, including Royal Kxao ǀUi!o!oo, a Ju!’hoan man based in Tsumkwe who was the only San member of parliament (2000–2010) and who was appointed Deputy Minister for Marginalized Communities in 2015. The former regional councillor of Tsumkwe District, Kxao Moses, was a well-known Ju!’hoan man who had previously served as the conservancy manager; the current regional councilor is Francina Ghauz, also from the Ju!’hoan community. Despite these few important positions of leadership, the recent national survey found that

the Ju!’hoansi still find participation in modern political structures to be a struggle. The communication of feedback from Ju!’hoan leaders to village residents remains a challenge, given the dispersal of the villages and the lack of experience with representational models of government. Discussion group participants also reported a feeling of not being heard in decision-making processes at the local level, and of being passed over for employment in government positions in favour of people from other ethnic groups. [Hays et al. 2014:128, in Dieckmann et al.]

Why, despite the apparent advances in political leadership and opportunities for self-government, do the Ju!’hoansi express frustration with their political representation and participation in decision-making processes? Early on in the process of preparing for a Conservancy, Bieseke pointed out that the apparent benefits of the existence of the NNFC concealed some serious problems stemming from the transition that the Ju!’hoansi are being asked to make (1994; 1995). I would like to keep in mind Bieseke’s call for recognition of the “historical and environmental reasons” for Ju!’hoansi relationship patterns in the quote opening this chapter. These are in large part an adaptation to a specific environment, the Kalahari desert, and to a hunting and gathering lifestyle. Bieseke also emphasizes the depth of the challenge the Ju!’hoansi – and other San – face in entering national and global economies and government structures. Although the various projects targeting the Nyae Nyae area emphasized the importance of local involvement in the design of projects, deeper conflicts stem from inherent contradictions in the design and goals of development projects as they relate to traditional Ju!’hoansi communicational culture:

Authorities (TA) can make decisions about civil cases according to customary law, as long as it does not contradict the constitution of Namibia. If only one group is living in a designated territory, the TA effectively has decision making power over that territory. This is the case in many wildlife conservancies, including Nyae Nyae.

How the Ju'hoan people of the Nyae Nyae area were to relate to each other in such changing times was coming to depend partly on models they were learning from the outside. These include new organizational structures, communicational modes, hierarchical concepts of authority, delegation of responsibility, and concepts of political representation. But to a great extent the way in which the Ju'hoansi related to each other was still based on expectations and social patterns from their past. These patterns were self-evident to the Ju'hoan people, and they were continually surprised that outsiders involved in mentoring them did not know of their special ways of thinking and modes of behavior. Many problems arose merely because communicational and relational cultures were at cross-purposes with each other. [Biesele and Hitchcock 2011:5]

One example Biesele provides is that of political representation. Citing Lee's well-known quote of a Ju'hoan man in the 1960s – “Each one of us is a headman over himself” (1979: 348) – Biesele describes the idea of one individual representing the interests of another in decision-making processes as anathema to Ju'hoansi culture:

This extremely tolerant social style has deep roots in Ju'hoan childrearing practices, practices still being repeated today despite great change. In the face of opposition or stubbornness, Ju'hoansi have been taught to shrug and say “each person is entitled to her own opinion.” [1995:7]

This also has deep implications for the participation of the Ju'hoansi in broader political culture, and also for the design and implementation of development projects, and illustrates some of the contradictions inherent in leadership for small-scale, egalitarian societies. On



Fig. 13: Chief Tsamkxao ǀOma, known as Bobo, in 2011

the one hand, an over-emphasis on the lack of a tradition of leadership structures among the Ju'hoansi, coupled with romantic stereotypes about the egalitarian and “forever nomadic” Bushmen, has in some cases led to the assumption that they cannot participate in broader representational structures. Silke Felton has argued that the Ju'hoansi and other San groups are developing “new-time leaders” who function alongside the traditional leadership, filling different roles, and who have become far more politically savvy than they are often given credit for (2000:6; see also Sylvain 2003). This is a critical point; the ways in which the culture develops its own styles and categories of leadership in response to changing circumstances need to be recognized by the outside

parties that they negotiate with. It is equally important to recognize that these new leaders, young and old, are often expected to make a complete transition to the new positions of leadership, and there is very little recognition of the profound gaps that they are expected to bridge and the social stresses that come along with such positions. These dilemmas and apparent contradictions will resurface throughout this book as various areas of contention and struggle relating to education in Nyae Nyae.

Alcohol

One major issue that has surfaced with the increasing settlement of the Ju'hoansi is, as with indigenous peoples in many places, alcohol. Today, Tsumkwe town is well known for its "shebeens," or drinking establishments (which exist on the fringes of legality), and the availability of alcohol in the town is both a part of its attraction and a source of endless despair to both Ju'hoansi and others concerned with their well-being. Many individuals – all non-Ju'hoansi, according to all accounts I have received – actively exploit the market niche. The prevalence of alcohol in Tsumkwe has changed over the years; Bieseke and Hitchcock point out that the town was known as the 'place of death' in the 1960s and 70s, partly because of the availability of alcohol and the social disintegration that it engendered (2011). In 2004, Wiessner estimated that "up to a third of Ju'hoan income, or more, is spent on alcohol;" she vividly describes the scene and suggests some reasons behind the extensive alcohol use by some:

On paydays Tjum!kui becomes a throbbing disco converting cash that has not been spent on food or goods to alcohol. Ju'hoansi drink for a variety of reasons: for entertainment, out of boredom or frustration over unemployment, to relieve social tension, or to get some pleasure from their work before unrelenting relatives relieve them of the rest of their income. [11]

Susser describes a dramatic increase that took place between her visits in 1996/7 and 2003²¹ when "a complex dynamic between development, inclusion and politics has pushed [the Ju'hoansi] into greater interaction with cash, profits and alcohol" – again linking the supposed benefits of development (i.e. increased access to cash) with the destructive effects of alcohol (2009:186). By 2008, through the work of the Ju'hoansi TA (especially Francina Ghauz, the current Regional Councillor), many of the shebeens were shut down. But by 2011, there was once again a thriving business, and the local officer for the Ministry of Land and Housing seemed powerless to stop it. One problem was the sale of alcohol on credit. This common (though illegal) practice meant that the pension money of the elderly was

²¹ It should be noted that during this period, government food rations to the villages stopped for a number of years, causing a general migration to Tsumkwe.

often spent (by the pensioners or by their relatives) before it was paid, and was intercepted by shebeen owner-creditors before it reached the hand of its intended recipient.

The use of alcohol to relieve social tension is not uncommon among peoples in transition, but its mechanisms are often overlooked or underestimated. When people find themselves in a position where they have no option but to behave in ways that directly contradict deeply inscribed social rules, drinking may temporarily lessen the psychological discomfort. Rapid intensification of population density and of intimate contact with peoples from other ethnic groups seem to have created such a situation for the Ju/'hoansi. There is also the increasing need to participate in social institutions (national and local government, NGOs, education systems) that require forms of social and political organization (such as democratic representation) and individual behavior (competing against others and "speaking for" others) which run contrary to all assumptions about appropriate social behavior among the Ju/'hoansi. This can create profound psychological unease throughout the culture – especially for those in positions of prominence, where they are often required to act in ways that may feel deeply anti-social to them.

The abuse of alcohol by the Ju/'hoansi in general, and in particular by individuals in positions of responsibility and prestige, is a source of great frustration and disappointment for Ju/'hoansi and outsiders alike. Many outsiders take a "hard-line" disciplinary stance to this problem – particularly when it manifests in those in positions of responsibility – and emphasize the notion of personal accountability. However, as Sylvain points out, the Ju/'hoansi themselves often respond with tolerance to this behavior, and focus their energy on healing the rifts frequently caused by alcohol use (usually fighting or other problematic behavior), rather than on condemning or punishing a drunken perpetrator (2006). I noticed throughout my fieldwork that healing trance dances often followed particularly disturbing episodes involving alcohol-fueled aggression and violence.²²

While the abuse of alcohol is certainly a problem, other important factors must also be taken into consideration. One is the extent to which the Ju/'hoansi, and other San, are also

²² On one occasion, a small truck belonging to the local police force arrived in the village I was staying in, with a small group of men on the back who were selling 'kashipembe' – illegal home-made hard grain alcohol, which the villagers bought with the money I had just paid them for the nights I would be camping in the village. Many villagers became intoxicated and several fights broke out; the scene was so chaotic that when the National Census Team arrived to collect information, they took one look around and immediately left, saying they would return another time. I was dismayed that I had indirectly contributed to this situation. That evening, as people were waking up from their alcohol-induced afternoon sleep, they stumbled towards the large fire where some women were already clapping and singing. The ceremony that followed included an interpretation of the day's events by one healer, a woman, who shifted all blame away from any individuals and focused on steps to heal the rifts.

exposed to the irresponsible – and undisciplined – use of alcohol by members of other ethnic groups. In her description of how the Ju'hoansi farm workers of the Omaheke²³ respond to alcohol, Sylvain points out that

[i]t is too easy to see excessive drinking simply as a 'Bushman problem', as many in the Omaheke do. Drinking is also a way of life among other African groups, including white farmers. Although many farmers I spoke to expressed deep concerns about the San's 'drinking problem', they usually did so after more than a few shots of *Jägermeister*. Furthermore, drunken violence is not unique to the San. [2006:141]

In addition to the extreme power differential between the Ju'hoansi (and other San) on the one hand and other groups (such as white farmers, development workers, or government representatives) on the other, there are also very different histories of alcohol use. Biesele points out that it can be problematic to “blame the victim of alcohol abuse if s(he) comes from a community with no previous social rules to contain alcohol use” (1993a:9). Intensive efforts at culturally appropriate alcohol counseling might help to mitigate the problems, but thus far this approach has not been consistently tried.

I would like to emphasize that the reasons people consume alcohol are not only social and psychological; another reason people drink is to stave off hunger.²⁴ Alcohol is sometimes more readily available, and often cheaper, than food. One young Ju'hoansi man who had just lost his job because of various offences related to his abuse of alcohol, explained it to me like this:

Staying [here in Tsumkwe] we do not have any food to eat, so I go around and I get some drink with people so that I do not feel hunger. Some people will buy the alcohol, and I will drink with them. The next day I feel like I want to die. Then sometimes I just do the same thing again...In [the villages] if we don't have food I can just go to the veld and find something to eat, but here in Tsumkwe you can't do that. [Field-notes March 2002]²⁵

²³ The Omaheke Ju'hoansi are related to the Nyae Nyae people, but they are a distinct group with different history and current living situation; see Suzman 2000; Sylvain (1999, 2000, 2006); Hays and Ninkova (forthcoming).

²⁴ Suzman (1999) and Sylvain (2006) both make a similar observation for the Ju'hoansi of the Omaheke.

²⁵ It should be noted that even those who have employment frequently find themselves without money, sometimes because of trouble accessing their payments, but more often because they have been “relieved” of it by relatives who feel also entitled to it.

Do you like the Bush?

In addition to being a comment on alcohol, the above quote reflects a contrast between subsistence strategies available at Tsumkwe, as opposed to the villages.²⁶ A striking illustration of the relationship between the Ju/'hoansi and Tsumkwe town is provided in the results of a recent survey by Lee, published in *Tsumkwe at 50: The 2010 Social Survey of a Namibian Ju/'hoan Town*.²⁷ With two students and two Ju/'hoansi assistants, Lee conducted an in-depth survey in Tsumkwe in 2010. Ninety-eight Ju/'hoan adults were interviewed, roughly evenly divided between men and women; and between residents of Tsumkwe and non-residents from villages who were temporarily in the town. One of Lee's findings was that people are still dependent to a large degree on wild foods; these findings matched those of the (differently-focused) survey in Nyae Nyae in 2011, reported in Dieckmann et al. (2014). These and other results of Lee's survey are striking in many ways and will be noted in relevant places in the following chapters.

Perhaps the most striking responses, however, were replies to the simple question "Do you like the Bush?" The question was an invitation to compare life in Tsumkwe with life in the villages, and the response was unequivocal: only two out of the 98 respondents replied that the bush and town were equal "and only one lone informant stated that he preferred living in town where his children are employed" (Lee 2013:224). Ninety-five of the interviewees in Lee's survey claimed not only that they "liked the bush" but that they preferred it to town, and gave detailed reasons for this preference. As reported by Lee, a major reason was that "food is free and is plentiful compared to town" (ibid.). Other reasons included the relative absence of alcohol (and thus less violence and disruption) and because living in the bush was their culture and their way of life – "who we are as a people." Life in the village was also reported to be less "stressful" and "boring" than that in Tsumkwe (ibid.). Lee concludes his summary of his survey findings with an important observation, one that is also inextricably related to education:

We see the Tsumkwe peoples' pro-foraging values as a strong vote of confidence by the people themselves in favor of one large element of their tradition; the material bases of foraging life. No longer infatuated by the promise of alternate ways of living, the Ju/'hoansi of 2010 have had two generations to let the reality sink in. And while not abandoning town life or technology they are keeping access to veld or "coun-

²⁶ Tsumkwe itself was once a *n!ore* that supported a small group of people, less than 30 at any given time. In the 1960s, hundreds of people came into the area, lured by McIntyre's promises of food, training, and work and the bush foods were quickly depleted; today, they barely appear at all in the town and surrounding areas (Bieseke, personal communication 2007).

²⁷ It is also a new chapter in the fourth edition (2013) of Lee's classic ethnography *The Dobe Ju/'hoansi*.

try” food as part of their ecological adaptation. Fortunately the return to foraging as a major component of their daily life has occurred while the traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) necessary for effective foraging is still being transmitted generation to generation and is part of the current body of knowledge of 20 and 30 year-old Ju!’hoansi. [2013:224]²⁸

The extent to which people are still reliant upon hunting and gathering for their food is a question that is central to development strategies in the area. In the past, this has been an area of conflict between involved outsiders, including academics and development workers, who have engaged with the Nyae Nyae Ju!’hoansi in a variety of capacities over the years. A split between two general “camps,” each advocating a particular approach to the current situation of the Ju!’hoansi, revolved around whether development efforts should be focused primarily on a) the integration of the Ju!’hoansi into the mainstream culture and economy through supporting efforts at agriculture and entry into the cash economy, or b) the continuing cultivation of hunting, tracking and gathering skills upon which they relied for centuries (or perhaps millennia), and the cultural integrity of the people themselves. The latter approach also includes the cultivation of traditional skills that can be used for “modern” enterprises such as eco-tourism and professional tracking (see Hays 2007).

Recent findings about subsistence strategies in Nyae Nyae make clear that the Ju!’hoansi do not seem to see this as an “either/or” question. They are working carefully at the level of individual, village, and conservancy to balance their options and to ensure sustainable subsistence strategies. How do we recognize and respect the ways in which Ju!’hoan culture is grounded in a hunting and gathering lifestyle and an egalitarian social ethic, and acknowledge the profundity of the cultural shift that participation in modern institutions requires, without condemning them to a choice between abandoning their culture or living perpetually on the margins of the modern world? These questions are utterly relevant to approaches to language and education, and were at the heart of the early conception of the Village Schools. Before moving on to a description of the Village Schools, the next two chapters provide contextual, conceptual and cultural background that facilitates a deeper understanding of this particular case.

²⁸ Lee links this continuing reliance on wild veld foods to the “relatively robust state of nutrition and health of the Ju!’hoansi,” noting that the current land base of the Conservancy provides up to one third of the calories consumed by Ju!’hoansi in Tsumkwe. He also points out that this percentage is probably far higher in the villages – this also corresponds to the findings reported in Dieckmann et al., although more specific figures are not available (Lee 2013:224; Dieckmann et al. 2014).

3 Like they are in jail: global and local contexts of San education

In mainstream research the phenomenon of “dropping out” is commonly defined as an issue of individual failure. Youth “fail,” either academically or socially, to make it through school. The problem exists not because of deficiencies in the schools but rather because of deficiencies in individuals and families. Youth who leave school are described as deviant, dysfunctional, or deficient because of individual, family, or community characteristics... Solutions reside on remediating or changing youth and families to better “fit in.”

[Deyhle, in Huffmann 2010:98]

When the educational system was put into place, all of our children received a 12-year sentence to learn a foreign language and a foreign way of life...there were many things that became obscured so that we could no longer see or fully understand ourselves or our world.

[Kawagley 2001:52]

The focus of this book is the Nyae Nyae area and the specific dynamics there – the Village Schools, the government schools, the history and lives of people in that particular area and the ways in which their more general struggles to maintain self-determination are played out in the schools. The problems are many, complex, intertwined, and very difficult to figure out how to address – and they are not unique to the Jul’hoansi, or to the San. The striking similarities reported by indigenous communities around the world point to systemic barriers that confront them in formal education systems, and recognition of these broader patterns in which the Nyae Nyae community is embedded is necessary to understand the local phenomenon.

In all parts of the world today, indigenous peoples are still among the most economically and politically marginalized of all minorities. Access to education is frequently put forward as the solution to these inequities but for most, formidable barriers block this access, and indigenous peoples’ experiences with the formal education system have often been devastating. Patterns of indigenous exclusion – and how best to address them – are the subject of a large body of literature. This global perspective both sheds some light on the questions surrounding education in Nyae Nyae, and shows how the specifics of one case can provide insight into broader questions. How do we approach these complicated issues? What is at the root of the problems? What fundamental assumptions play into the identification of underlying problems and proposed solutions? This chapter will first provide a brief overview

of indigenous education globally, and then examine various theoretical approaches to these patterns and discuss how they relate to the situation of the San.

Indigenous peoples and education

Although indigenous peoples live in widely varied circumstances around the world and are culturally very different from each other, they share an identifiable pattern when it comes to their experiences in modern formal education systems. There exists an extensive body of literature pointing to a complex of challenges confronting indigenous minorities in mainstream schools. These include the separation of children from their families starting from a young age, while they attend schools (for children from remote communities, this usually means boarding schools far from their home). There they are taught foreign systems of knowledge, in a language other than their own, by teachers from cultures that are different from, discriminate against, and are dominant to their own. The disciplinary styles used at schools are often alien to indigenous students, and the standards by which students' behavior is judged in schools often directly contradict values and standards of the home community. The skills that indigenous children bring with them are almost always devalued or simply not recognized in formal schools, which has the effect of undermining the confidence of the students in their own competence from the start. Poverty, social stigma, and social stress within indigenous communities exacerbate all of these problems (see, for example Lipka et al. 1998; Battiste 2002; May and Aikman 2003; McCarty et al. 2003; Lomawaima and McCarty 2006; Abu-Said and Champagne 2006; Jacob et al. 2015). For almost all indigenous peoples some combination of the above factors and others add up to an experience of overall poor performance in formal education systems, accompanied by high dropout rates.

The dropout rate and general lack of access to formal education is the problem that receives by far the most attention, and efforts to address the lack of access generally focus upon increasing the numbers of indigenous students in mainstream systems. Often, those who succeed in the mainstream education system find themselves in an uneasy position straddling very different cultures, worldviews, and economic realities. Those who are able to remain in the formal system against the enormous odds are often not able to overcome the final hurdles in the last few years of secondary schooling that would allow them to continue to tertiary education. Such students have made an enormous cultural sacrifice but remain, by the standards of formal education, failures.

Although education today is almost always considered to be positive and necessary, it is important to keep in mind the relationship between formal education and European coloni-

zation. Education has been one of the most insidious elements of colonial domination and contributed in complex ways to the social breakdown of indigenous communities throughout the world. Bartholemew Dean describes “the abysmal record of historical abuse and colonial domination exercised through the imposition of formal education” (2004:14). Raymundo Rovillos calls formal, western style education a “handmaiden of assimilation” and describes how such education resulted in the “virtual obliteration” of most of indigenous peoples of their way of life (1999:1). The most effective “fields of intercultural contact” were religion and education, with schools – run partly by missionaries and partly by the state – functioning as the foremost mediators of cultural values (Osterhammel 1999; Lomawaima and McCarty 2006).

The moral justification of the colonialist enterprise was based largely in the assumption of European moral, civil, and cultural superiority and the inevitability of European expansion and modernization. Throughout colonial history, there were individuals and social movements that recognized the value and validity of indigenous cultures or even viewed them as superior to European civilization in many ways – but they had little faith in the ability of the “native” to withstand the onslaught of the western advances (Sheehan 1974). These assumptions – the superiority of formal education and culture and the seeming inevitability of the absorption of the San and other indigenous peoples into the dominant cultures and economies – are very much still in play today in southern Africa.

Schooling played an ambiguous role during the colonial era; even as it was one of the primary instruments of assimilation, it also represented an opportunity for the colonized to learn (or learn about) the language, culture, and knowledge base of the colonizers – valuable survival skills both for individuals and for their communities. Colonial governments also recognized the value that education had for the “natives” and generally viewed provision of it as a service that they provided to the dominated population. Today, indigenous activists, lawyers, teachers, and others who have made it through the formal education system play a vital role in local community development, the international indigenous movement, and other political, economic and social spheres. Education is clearly both critical and highly problematic for indigenous communities and individuals around the world, including the San.

A familiar picture of failure and despair

WIPCE has outlined in *The Coolangatta Statement On Indigenous Peoples’ Rights in Education* the effects that formal education – often compulsory – has had upon indigenous communities. A frustration that characterizes indigenous experiences with schooling is the contradiction between the desire to access education, and the unsatisfactory quality of that which is available:

Historically, Indigenous peoples have insisted upon the right of access to education. Invariably the nature, and consequently the outcome, of this education has been constructed through and measured by non-Indigenous standards, values and philosophies. Ultimately the purpose of this education has been to assimilate Indigenous peoples into non-Indigenous cultures and societies. Volumes of studies, research and reports dealing with Indigenous peoples in non-Indigenous educational systems paint a familiar picture of failure and despair. When measured in non-Indigenous terms, the educational outcomes of Indigenous peoples are still far below that of non-Indigenous peoples. This fact exists not because Indigenous peoples are less intelligent, but because educational theories and practices are developed and controlled by non-Indigenous peoples. [Coolangatta Statement 1999, section 1.3.1]

Indigenous peoples from all parts of the world describe their experiences with education in strikingly similar terms. Donna Ah Chee (1996) describes how Australian Aborigines rights to educate their children have been systematically suppressed since the beginning of colonization over 200 years ago. Children were taken from families and forced to learn in “western-style” education systems, a process that resulted in the loss of over one quarter of the vast linguistic diversity of Australia. Oscar Kawagley describes the “cultural blizzard” of colonialism that overtook his people, the Yup’ik of Alaska, culminating in the imposition of the Western educational system (2001). For many indigenous groups, education continues to be a site of cultural struggle today. Barnhart and Kawagley describe indigenous students from around the world as having

demonstrated a distinct lack of enthusiasm for the experience of schooling in its conventional form; an aversion that is most often attributable to an alien institutional culture, rather than any lack of innate intelligence, ingenuity, or problem-solving skills on the part of the students...The curricula, teaching methodologies and assessment strategies associated with mainstream schooling are based on a worldview that does not adequately recognize or appreciate indigenous notions of an interdependent universe and the importance of place in their societies. [2005:10]

A large body of literature examining the disproportionate failure of indigenous minorities points to both linguistic and cultural differences between the school and the home, and to enormous structural obstacles. Both the cultural and structural barriers are especially profound for communities who still maintain an ethos and social organization associated with hunting and gathering, as do many indigenous groups around the world – whether or not they are still able to live according to these subsistence methods.

One problem resulting from these dynamics is that indigenous communities have not been able to fully access skills that they need to obtain in order to participate on equal terms in national and global economic and political systems. Another, equally problematic, result of indigenous peoples’ experiences in mainstream education systems has been the devalu-

ation and ultimate loss of indigenous knowledge that has been developed by communities over centuries or millennia of intimate contact with the environment that they depend upon for survival. Because attending formal schools very often requires children to be separated from the environment in which they learn traditional skills, the transmission of these skills begins to decline. The following observation made several decades ago in a report by a Yupik man reflects serious concerns about the negative impact of modern education on his communities' ability to survive; it is still relevant in many places today, including southern Africa:

Our young people are often not prepared in practical ways to live in either world. Their high school programs supposedly lead to careers and professions, but all too often the young people cannot find jobs. Employment in the region is scarce...Likewise, the young people are often not prepared to live in the bush. During their student years they have not been learning all the skills necessary to subsist off the land. One result of their studies has been that many have not had the opportunities to learn how to hunt, fish, prepare food and make clothing. If subsistence skills are lost, there could be tragic consequences... People have survived in this region only because they have known how to draw food, clothing and shelter from the land. [Napoleon 1974]

To what extent is it important that traditional skills continue to be passed on to younger generations? This is a question that indigenous communities must answer for themselves, and will depend upon both cultural values and economic options. I will return to this point as it relates to the Jul'hoansi later in this book.

Indigenous resistance and rights

In the face of profound incongruence, we find active resistance on the part of many indigenous students and their communities. One way in which this resistance is registered is through refusal to participate in an institution that does not serve their needs (and in many cases disadvantages them). A more positive approach is found in efforts to create educational programs that *do* respect their culture and meet their needs. Indigenous peoples around the world are claiming, in addition to the right to participate in formal education systems if they so choose, the right *not* to be assimilated into other cultural systems through the education system, and the right to establish their own systems of education (McCarty 2002, 2005; Abu-Said and Champagne 2006; Villegas et al. 2008; Murillo 2009). The case of the Nyae Nyae Jul'hoansi and the Village Schools provides an example both of resistance and of innovation – though these are not always recognized as such.

The desire of indigenous peoples to access more appropriate education has been an important pillar of the international indigenous rights movement. Since 1948, access to educa-

tion has been recognized as a fundamental human right in international documents. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that primary education should be “free” and “compulsory” (UN 1948). Since the World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, the global initiative to provide primary education for *all* of the world’s children has gained momentum. The “right to education” is usually understood to mean the right to participation in state educational institutions, and efforts to increase access to this right – to move towards Education for All – are generally aimed at overcoming what are seen as obstacles to full participation in formal education systems.

Indigenous peoples and their historical experiences with education provide a particular challenge to the fundamental assumptions underlying the rights-based discourses of education. International indigenous rights mechanisms emphasize the right of indigenous peoples both to access mainstream systems, and to establish their own systems. This is clearly outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which states in Article 14 that

(1) Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning; (2) Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination; and (3) States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language. [UN 2007:Article 14]

The UN Expert Mechanism for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) specified in Article 21 of its study on indigenous education that:

States are obliged to ensure that all indigenous school-age children have access to free education, including through indigenous neighborhood or community-based schools providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. In order to guarantee cultural safety and culturally appropriate education for indigenous students, curricula must be based on, or sufficiently reflect, indigenous peoples’ cultural values and beliefs. [EMRIP 2009:7–8]

The item goes on to specify that States are required to allocate funds to this purpose, “including specific State-funded programs for the education and recruitment of indigenous teachers” (*ibid.*)

One point that I would like to emphasize here is that the desires and demands expressed by the Nyae Nyae Jul’hoansi (described in more detail in following chapters) are neither

unique nor unreasonable. They are fully in keeping with the desires that other indigenous communities around the world express, with what global experts have agreed is both sound and necessary. Furthermore, access to this kind of education is defined in international law as a right that governments are required to provide for indigenous and other minorities. While such provision entails many challenges – as described in this book – it is important to recognize that this is not a ‘special’ service provided by a government to a small group of people. In taking on the challenge of providing mother tongue and culturally appropriate education to the Nyae Nyae Ju!’hoansi, the Namibian government is both fulfilling an obligation, and setting an important example within the region.

Approaches to indigenous education

In the quote opening this chapter, Donna Deyhle is describing what she has observed over years of working with Ute and Navajo students in the southwest US, although it could very well be describing dominant perspectives on San education in southern Africa. Among the many individuals and institutions interested in increasing the participation of the San in the government schools, the discourse frequently centers on the failure of San students to progress through the government school system. Usually, the blame for their lack of participation is placed on the San themselves – the parents who are not involved enough, the children who are not used to being away from their family, their cultural practices which lure them away from school and into the bush (see also Hays 2007; 2000). Efforts to get the children to stay at school thus focus on overcoming these cultural ‘problems’ – convincing parents of the value of education, and suggesting that they leave their children behind at the school instead of taking them out on long gathering trips, for example. San parents, on the other hand, say that they value education and want their children to attend. How do we understand these contradictory perspectives on the problem?

Research-based explanations over the past several decades for indigenous peoples’ dismal success rates within mainstream formal education can be divided into three general strands; I will refer to these as *cultural deprivation*, *cultural discontinuity*, and *structural inequality* (see also Au 1993; Huffman 2010; Wyatt 2012).¹ Applying these three approaches to the problem of “dropouts”² in the Nyae Nyae community – and connecting them with

¹ For an excellent discussion of theoretical approaches to indigenous education, see Huffman 2010. While his focus is on Native American students, Huffman’s thorough and clear overview is very applicable to indigenous education elsewhere.

² As I explain later in the book, the students do not normally refer to themselves as “dropouts”; however the term is frequently used by others to refer to those who have left school and will not come back.

perspectives on how best to address the problem – provides insight into some of the problems themselves. Below, I provide a brief sketch of each of these perspectives. The intention here is not to go deeply into a theoretical discussion, but to highlight the main themes of the various approaches, and then to examine how they apply to the situation of the Nyae Nyae Jul'hoansi and other San.

Cultural deficit

In the mid twentieth century, explanations for the fact that some groups of students fared less well in mainstream education systems assumed that school failure by indigenous and other minorities was the result of cultural deprivation. This approach, also referred to as *cultural deficit theory*, places the blame for poor performance or lack of participation on the 'deficient' culture and home life of the students – and approaches to the problem are based on overcoming cultural obstacles. Associated with the “culture of poverty” theories put forward in the 1960s by Oscar Lewis (1966), cultural deficit models propose that the circumstances of poor and marginalized children's lives condition them in ways that are not conducive to school success. They may be said to have lower ability, low self-esteem, less work ethic, or to place a low importance on education. A key element of this perspective is that the responsibility for the situation is placed outside of the school environment and located within the home community of the students.

Although this approach was an improvement over blatantly racist assumptions that marked minority education discourses in the first half of that century, the explanation is still founded on strong racist and cultural biases. Furthermore, overcoming this barrier involves individuals 'overcoming' their culture and assimilating to the dominant educational and cultural practices. In the most extreme cases, children are removed from the influence of their parents and communities so that they can participate in the formal education system without their interference. The argument that this is “for their own good” has long been a justification for the boarding schools that are known to have been destructive to indigenous communities (see for example Sheehan 1974; Lomawaima 1995; Niezen 2013).

Cultural deprivation theories have been thoroughly discredited within the academic literature on indigenous education and they are no longer considered valid. Explanations based on cultural stereotypes can have deep resonance and apparent explanatory power, however, and such approaches did not disappear from the public discourses surrounding San education. These discourses in turn have an effect on policy. Suzman sums it up: “Dominant stereotypes of San are almost uniformly negative. Perceptions of San social inferiority are so widespread that they clearly influence policy and its implementation” (2001:xviii). The following chapters will provide examples of ways in

which a deficit approach to education has steered attention away from other cultural and structural issues.

Cultural discontinuity

In the 1960s, in reaction to the trend of blaming minorities' school failure on deficiencies in their culture, anthropologists working with indigenous communities began to argue for an approach that recognizes the profound *cultural discontinuity* that can exist between schools and home. This approach promotes the understanding that indigenous children bring with them to school the foundations of language(s), culture(s), values, skills and knowledge learned from their home communities (e.g. Wax et al. 1964; Cazdan 1973; Hymes 1974; Trueba et al. 1981; Erickson and Mohatt 1982; Phillips 1983; Heath 1983). An important part of this argument is that schools almost invariably reflect the communicational cultures and value systems of more powerful groups. Although, for indigenous children, these foundations may differ significantly from the learning elements of the mainstream schools, they are not *deficient*. An emphasis on cultural discontinuity prioritizes micro-level interactions between students and their families, on the one hand, and "the school" on the other, both in the classroom and out of it.

In southern Africa these more powerful groups, whose interests are reflected in the mainstream school systems, include both local dominant cultures and those of European colonizers. The formal education system is based on European models of education with English as the primary target language (in Namibia, English, Afrikaans, and German are the only languages in which one can get an education through Grade 12). Even though this model has been in some ways adapted to local language and cultures, these are the dominant Bantu languages and cultures, which differ significantly from those of the San. Furthermore, teachers are also from these dominant groups (see also Chapter 6).

Cultural discontinuity can be deceptively easy to identify – and is very often oversimplified, focusing on the most overt cultural expressions such as language, dress, and subsistence patterns; in some cases it can feed into existing stereotypes (see the story at the end of this chapter). It takes careful observation to recognize the deep differences that the obvious patterns signify – as Dell Hymes points out, these characteristics can be hard to see:

Too often the differences of which the school is aware, of which even the community is aware, are only the most visible, "high" culture symbols and the most stereotyped conventions. What may be slighted is the "invisible" culture...the culture of everyday etiquette and interaction and its expression of rights and duties, values and aspirations, through norms of communication. [1980:59]

Where differences, and the difficulties they cause for indigenous students, are recognized, they are often viewed as something to be overcome, rather than a foundation to be built upon.

While recognition of these differences is critical to a comprehensive understanding of the low rates of indigenous peoples' success in mainstream schools, this does not provide a complete answer to the questions surrounding the indigenous students' persistent low level of performance in schools. Levinson and Hooley describe their findings based on research with the Roma Gypsies and Indigenous Australians, noting that the community's own pedagogical systems appeared to be incongruent with learning systems in the school setting. Furthermore, they state that

[i]n neither case, does it seem that schools have the institutional flexibility to allow for such differences. The focus of schools is on the acquisition of a knowledge/skills base which pertains to economic futures; there is little recognition that there is an ideology and value system involved that might have an impact upon social and cultural identities. Designed as they are for mainstream groups following an essentially sedentary lifestyle, educational systems simply overlook the difficulties of adaptation for children from a nomadic background. [2014: 384]

They point out that these difficulties are about more than just cultural differences between "mainstream" and "nomadic" groups that affect education – they describe conflicting world views held by each of the nomadic groups, vis-à-vis the mainstream society: "It is a conflict between the values of an educational system shaped by relationships within communities and one that seeks to prioritize the rights and autonomy of the individual in a way that detaches the individual from the communal context" (385).

Although there is much local variation, general differences between indigenous pedagogical strategies and formal education tend to include differences in the quality of the knowledge itself (e.g. holistic rather than compartmentalized), teaching and learning methods (e.g. interactive and demonstrative rather than authoritarian and didactic) and social values that govern learning behavior (e.g. cooperative rather than competitive) (Barnhardt and Kawagley 2005). The standards by which students' behavior is judged in schools often directly contradict values and standards of the home community, and the skills that indigenous children bring to school with them are almost always devalued, or simply not recognized, in formal schools. This has the effect of undermining the confidence of the students in their own competence from the very beginning of their school experience. These generalizations about learning strategies describe indigenous cultures more generally; it is important to note that hunter-gatherer strategies vary in significant ways from those of settled agricultural communities (who can also be indigenous peoples). I will return to these

distinctions later in this chapter, and the following chapter explores these cultural and pedagogical dynamics as they take shape for the Nyae Nyae Ju'hoansi.

Structural inequality theory

Developed largely as a reaction to arguments prioritizing cultural differences, structural inequality theories take a macro-level approach, examining the structural barriers created by broader social patterns. Many possible angles are subsumed within this label; Huffman identifies three basic assumptions underlying structural inequality approaches as they relate to indigenous education (all of which are relevant to the Nyae Nyae case): that the challenges faced by indigenous peoples are the result of “historically produced social structural conditions”; that the educational institutions reflect and reproduce the power relations in society at large; and, finally, that indigenous peoples and other minorities are actively making decisions, and resisting the processes of marginalization that are being replicated in the school system (2010:74). For example, Dehlye, quoted at the opening of the chapter, goes on to say that:

A critical examination of the “place” of Navajo and Ute youth in their school and community reveals other reasons than just individual failure for “dropping out.” Structural factors restricting opportunities, in effect, “fail” youth. The decision to leave school can then be seen, in part, as a rational response to irrelevant schooling; racism; restricted political, social, and economic opportunities; and the desire to maintain a culturally distinct identity. [Dehlye 2010:98]

On their own, both the cultural discontinuity and the structural inequality approaches have major gaps. As Huffman points out, “cultural discontinuity has been criticized for a lack of attention to social structural conditions” while “structural inequality theorists have been criticized for failing to appreciate the importance of such microlevel phenomena as teaching practices and personal relationships” (ibid., 73). Although there have been some strong cases made for and against both of these (Ogbu 1978; 1982; 1987, Peshkin 1997), cultural discontinuity and structural inequality relate to and reinforce each other in a number of ways and I approach these theoretical perspectives as complementary (see McCarty 2009). Recognizing the balance between the importance of understanding local specifics and dynamics and understanding how these play into larger patterns is crucial to a full understanding of any social problem.

Theoretical and methodological perspectives on Nyae Nyae and the Village Schools

Although complementary, these theoretical approaches have different emphases and require somewhat different methodological approaches. A significant portion of my work is based on ethnographic field research (including observation, participant observation, and various types of interviews) with issues of “education” (broadly defined) at the center. This field research included participant observation with development organizations seeking to address the problems confronting San in education systems, as well as with local communities, in particular the Nyae Nyae Ju’hoansi. My primary focus has been on the wider structural inequalities that create enormous barriers to school participation, and on the ways in which the Ju’hoansi respond to these challenges. I have paid close attention to how the Ju’hoansi students and parents described the situation and their active responses to it. Having conducted fieldwork also at the national and regional level, I have become acutely aware of the various discourses about the San on the part of teachers, school administrators, and others – and on how these played out in ways that upheld the social structures in which the Ju’hoansi, along with other San, find themselves on the bottom rung (see Hays 2007). The emphasis of my research has been on the role of education in the current marginalized status of the San – and also on the possibilities for the San to achieve self-determination both in and through education.

Identifying the barriers caused by cultural discontinuity, on the other hand, requires careful observations of the micro-level interactions in which cultural and linguistic differences cause discontinuity. Although this kind of observation was not at the center of my research, during my fieldwork period in Nyae Nyae (and elsewhere in southern Africa), I did spend time in the classrooms, and observed teaching approaches and methods and the insights gained are very relevant to, and inform, the arguments I am making here. I also draw upon the large body of anthropological research describing Ju’hoan child-rearing and knowledge transmission approaches, which covers a period of enormous transition for the people of Nyae Nyae (1950s–1990s). The observations of these researchers facilitated my understanding of the dynamics that I was witnessing; they are described in the following chapter.

Cultural differences were clearly one important factor causing Ju’hoan children to drop out of school in Tsumkwe; there are obvious and enormous problems created by language and different communicational cultures. Although inability to understand the language of instruction was not a reason generally given by Ju’hoan students themselves for dropping out, teachers and other school officials frequently noted that language was a problem. The Ju’hoan students from the Village Schools had not mastered English well enough

to understand instruction in the language in Grade 4. Parents frequently mentioned their children's inability to understand the language of instruction at the Tsumkwe school; this was one of the primary reasons for the development of the Village Schools – as described in Chapters 5 and 6. Many other, less obvious differences have also had far-reaching implications for education. These include some of the general differences between the San, as recent hunters and gatherers (or foragers), and the dominant southern African groups, most of whom are “farmers,” practicing subsistence strategies based on agriculture and/or pastoralism.

Hunter-gatherers and cultural discontinuity

A cultural discontinuity between home life and “mainstream” institutions – including the school – can be especially profound and problematic for communities who maintain an ethos and social organization associated with hunting and gathering – whether or not they are still able to live according to these subsistence methods. The skills, method of transmission, and social values that accompany a hunting and gathering subsistence strategy are not only different, but often in direct contradiction to those of more stratified and sedentary societies, including agriculturalists, pastoralists and agro-pastoralists (or “farmers”; this describes the dominant local cultures in southern Africa). Hewlett et al., working with hunter-gatherers in the Congo Basin, identify “three foundational schemas” that are pervasive in hunter-gatherer life: egalitarianism, autonomy and sharing. They explain these characteristics as follows:

An egalitarian way of thinking means others are respected for what they are and it is not appropriate to draw attention to oneself or judge others to be better or worse than others. Men and women, young and old, are viewed as relatively equal and have similar access to resources. Respect for an individual's autonomy is also a core cultural value. One does not coerce others, including children...A giving or sharing way of thinking also pervades hunter-gatherer life. [2011:1171]

They contrast this with the foundational schemas of farmers, which they characterize as: gender and age hierarchy, communalism (cultural value placed on putting the needs of the group over the needs of an individual), and material/economic dimensions that are woven into social and emotional relationships (ibid.). They note that while hunter-gatherer children are granted much autonomy throughout the day, farmer children are subject to the control of parents and older children. Another general finding among hunters and gatherers is that young children participate much less frequently in community work (and the associated skill development) than they do in societies that accumulate food, and there is little pressure for children to learn at a particular pace; they initiate the process when they are ready. This

is usually around adolescence, and is generally understood as ongoing throughout one's life (Hewlett and Lamb 2005; Munroe and Gauvain 2010).

Disciplinary styles associated with agricultural communities also generally entail physical force and corporal punishment, while among hunter-gatherers the norm is verbal correction; often in the form of teasing, belittling, or through stories describing what happens to one who does not share, or who otherwise does not behave according to the group standards (among the Ju!'hoansi this verbal correction can be quite severe; see Wiessner 2005). Overall, while the egalitarian ethos associated with small-scale hunting and gathering cultures usually fosters a tolerant approach to children (Schweitzer et al. 2000; Hewlett and Lamb 2005), formal education tends to be "deeply authoritarian in practice and hierarchical in its organization" (Bartholomew 2004:14).

Several researchers have observed that hunter-gatherers and other small-scale, highly mobile cultures tend to retain values and social relations – even when subsistence patterns begin to change (e.g. Peterson 1991; Barnard 2000). Based on their research with Roma Gypsies and Australian Aborigines, Levinson and Hooley conclude that "...a nomadic way of conceptualising the world persists even when communities have ceased to follow itinerant patterns" (2014:384). For the Ju!'hoansi, as well as other San communities, this is particularly true for the social mechanisms associated with maintaining egalitarian relations through the enforced sharing of resources (Barnard 2000; see also Bieseke 1993; Wiessner 2002). Although the Ju!'hoansi of Nyae Nyae, as described in the previous chapter, cannot survive solely by using traditional livelihood methods, they do still rely to a large degree upon bush foods, and maintain traditional culture, social networks, and subsistence patterns (Lee 2013; Dieckman et al. 2014; Hays and Ninkova forthcoming). What kinds of socialization processes support these patterns? How do these relate to formal schooling, and how are they changing? In what ways are they *not* changing – and what does this mean for their participation in schools and other national institutions? In the next chapter, I will provide an overview of the anthropological studies conducted among the Ju!'hoansi relating to socialization processes, and will discuss some ways in which these differences can create 'micro-level' problems for Ju!'hoansi students at government schools. These are not only small-scale problems, however, and I will discuss the ways in which these relate to structural barriers.

This question of "difference" in these strategies and values is in itself an important area of focus – but pedagogic aspects are another. How do formal schooling and Ju!'hoan culture and knowledge transmission compare in terms of teaching and learning effectiveness? The forms of knowledge and means of knowledge reproduction that the Ju!'hoansi utilize and practice (described in more detail in the next chapter), although associated with small-scale

egalitarian societies, are not backwards, out of date, or irrelevant. In fact, their strategies closely parallel the kinds of pedagogy that many educationalists recommend as effective education methods in modern society. In the following section, I briefly highlight relevant concepts and findings put forward by some progressive educationalists. While not an exhaustive discussion of pedagogical theory, this illustrates that the approach of the Jul'hoansi and other hunter-gatherers appears to be effective, common among human cultures, and consistent with the way human brains are hardwired to learn.

Pedagogical approaches

Lave and Wenger argue that the privileged position of schooling, “usually assumed to be a more effective and advanced institution for educational transmission,” causes us to overlook other evidence about how humans learn (1991:61). Central to their approach is the concept of situated learning within a community of practice, and an understanding of learning as an “integral part of the generative social practice in the lived-in world” (35). In this process, their concept of an individual as a legitimate peripheral participant refers to an individual in the process of “gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement” in a community of practice – this is situated learning (37). Their research into five kinds of apprenticeship revealed some common threads in approaches to learning within apprenticeship relationships:

[T]here is very little observable teaching; the more basic phenomenon is learning. The practice of the community creates the potential “curriculum” in the broadest sense – that which may be learned by newcomers with legitimate peripheral access. Learning activity appears to have a characteristic pattern. There are strong goals for learning because learners, as peripheral participants, can develop a view of what the whole enterprise is about, and what there is to be learned. Learning itself is an improvised practice: A learning curriculum unfolds in opportunities for engagement in practice. It is not specified as a set of dictates for proper practice. [93]

An important distinction made by Lave and Wenger is between a learning curriculum and a teaching curriculum:

A learning curriculum consists of situated opportunities for the improvisational development of new practice. A learning curriculum is a field of learning resources in everyday practice viewed from the perspective of the learners. A teaching curriculum, by contrast, is constructed for the instruction of newcomers. When a teaching curriculum supplies – and thereby limits – structuring resources for learning, the meaning of what is learned ... is mediated through an instructor’s participation, by an external view of what knowing is about. [97]

Lave and Wenger introduce the term *legitimate peripheral learning* as a way of conceptualizing this learning-centered process. They emphasize that it is not a specific “pedagogical strategy” but a kind of learning that occurs “whether there is any intentional educational form at all” (40). In using this term, they draw attention to the fact that the process of participation in a community of practitioners is an inevitable part of the learning process: “the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practices of a community” (29).

James Gee divides learning processes into three basic categories: natural, instructional and cultural (2004:10). Natural learning refers to processes that human brains are programmed to do and only exposure is needed – a good example is how we learn to speak our first language(s). In general, everyone learns these kinds of skills fairly equally. Instructional learning is the principle around which learning takes place in schools; Gee points out that some individuals are much better at learning in such contexts than others. The third process, what he calls cultural, is the way that we learn things that are “so important to a cultural group that the group ensures that everyone who needs to learn them” (12). Gee uses the example of learning how to cook, which is something that, although a few people may excel at it, everyone needs to learn “well enough” to survive – much like both hunting and gathering, and the associated skills among the Ju’hoansi. How do humans learn these most critical skills? According to Gee, this is almost never through instructional processes, but rather through processes such as that described by Lave and Wenger (1991; Lave 2011). Given the importance of these skills to survival, Gee argues that

it is clear that deep learning works better as a cultural process than it does an instructed process. Most humans are not, in fact, very good at learning via overt instruction...In today’s schools, many instructed processes, not least those connected to learning to read, involve practicing skills outside any contexts in which they are used by people who are adept at those skills. [13]

The lower relative effectiveness of instructional learning for young children has been demonstrated by recent research, which suggests that direct teaching constrains children’s own exploration and discovery, while observation followed by the opportunity to explore on their own led to more creative solutions (Bonawitz et al. 2011; Buchsbaum et al. 2011). Although formal schooling primarily relies upon *instructional* learning, at the other end of the educational spectrum – at the highest levels (Gee uses as an example the process of becoming a physicist; a “master” of physics) – *cultural* learning predominates. Learners (physics graduate students, for example) are allowed to collaborate with the masters on projects that they are not yet able to do on their own, are allowed access to the tools and technologies of the craft, and information is offered in the context in which it is immediately relevant

and in which it resonates with the learners' experiences. Thus, at the highest levels of the systems of institutionalized learning in the West, where the goal is to transmit extensive and profound understanding of a particular subject and to cultivate a spirit of rigorous and thorough testing of the problem at hand, the process of learning begins to closely resemble a cultural approach – such as that described also by Lave and Wenger.

Rogoff et al. describe a similar process to that of Lave and Wenger, which they call “first-hand learning through intent participation” (2003:175). They define this as a learning process that occurs through the involvement of children in the daily activities of the community, initially largely through observation and later through active participation. They call this “listening-in” and “pitching-in” and emphasize that people everywhere learn through such processes, though some communities – they mention indigenous communities in particular – “emphasize keen observation in support of participation in ongoing mature activities” (ibid. 197) They point out that the ability to learn through observation is diminished by schooling; Rogoff notes that “children who spend much of their day in segregated settings away from the productive activities of their communities (such as in school) have fewer such learning opportunities” (2012:324). Annahatak describes how this dynamic interrupts traditional knowledge transmission in Inuit communities: when students become accustomed to a Western educational style, they wait to be taught instead of actively observing. Inuit elders, however, are expecting to be watched, and neither initiates the traditional process of knowledge transmission (1994:16).

An important part of succeeding at any task has to do with an individual's motivation. Where does motivation to learn come from? Research over the past several decades has compared the effectiveness of external motivation (including rewards, threats, and grades) and internal motivation (responding to one's own desire to learn) as pedagogic strategies. Ryan and Deci present an extensive review and summary of the scientific literature about motivation. They conclude that the results of these studies show unequivocally that reliance on external motivation significantly diminishes the learning results:

[T]angible rewards [and] threats, deadlines, directives, pressured evaluations, and imposed goals diminish intrinsic motivation because...they conduce toward an external perceived locus of causality. In contrast, choice, acknowledgment of feelings, and opportunities for self-direction were found to enhance intrinsic motivation because they allow people a greater feeling of autonomy...Students taught with a more controlling approach not only lose initiative but learn less effectively, especially when learning requires conceptual, creative processing. [2000:70; emphasis added]

According to these researchers, a large body of scientific research conclusively demonstrates that the cultivation of internal motivation, rather than external pressure, result in far

more effective learning – an important point to keep in mind throughout the discussion of Ju|'hoan culture and education in the Nyae Nyae region.

As already noted (and further described in Chapter 5), Namibian educational policy is progressive and leaves much room for flexibility. There are many individuals who do recognize both the real difficulties that cultural and linguistic difference can cause San and other minority children in the classroom, and the structural inequalities that obviously exist. Nonetheless, the dominant perspective is one in which the San are expected to overcome their own cultural barriers in order to participate in the government schools. Although corporal punishment is outlawed, complaints about its practice persist. Even where children are not physically disciplined, the emphasis is upon punitive approaches as the means to ensure children's participation in the school. The cultural deficit approach described above is the dominant approach to San education across southern Africa. The example below is one of several similar conversations I have had with school officials regarding San education.

They don't like being punished

In interviews in 2010³ and 2011⁴, I asked the former principal of Tsumkwe Primary school (2006 – 2014) why he thought the Village Schools Learners were dropping out of Tsumkwe school. In each interview, he provided me with a long, enumerated list of reasons, which I have consolidated here. The first, and most emphatic, focus of the problem was on the Ju|'hoan Village Schools teachers – they received a large portion of the blame. The principal claimed that they were not teaching consistently, that they often left their villages, and that they did not give the children enough homework. As a result, he suggested, the children were not used to attending school regularly or doing homework and thus ran away from the TPS. He also said the teachers were abusing alcohol. A second focus was on the parents, who are “difficult to contact,” do not communicate regularly with the school, and do not encourage, or force, their children to come to the school. Thirdly, the learners themselves created problems; in Tsumkwe they frequented shebeens, used alcohol, smoked, and came back late and intoxicated to the hostel. The age of the Ju|'hoansi students was also identified as a problem; the principal said they sometimes started in Grade 4 when they were 17 or 18 years old, and were in the class with kids who are much younger than that. In general, the principal said that the Ju|'hoansi children found it difficult to interact with other kids at the

³ For an evaluation of the NAMAS San Education Program (Hays et al. 2010).

⁴ For the regional study on San livelihoods (Dieckmann et al. 2014).

school; “they form small groups and just stay with the kids from their village...they don’t adapt to the environment” (Interview, November 2011)

The principal noted some ways in which the culture of the Ju’hoansi children interfered with their school attendance, emphasizing in particular the lack of structure that the children experience in their villages:

[T]hey are not used to rules. They have no rules and then they come to the hostel and they find there are rules about when they have to go to sleep and get up, when they can eat...they are not used to this and it makes them feel like they are in jail. [ibid.]

When I asked him about complaints that they were being beaten or otherwise not treated well at the school or hostel, he said:

[T]hey are not used to being told ‘do this, do that’ and they don’t want to be treated like the others, they want to be treated special. If they don’t do their homework, they are supposed to get punished, but the Village School kids, they don’t like being punished. [ibid.]

He emphasized their desire to make their own decisions – but questioned the activities in which they were engaging: “[T]hey want to stay somewhere that they can go out late and go to the shebeen and drink, and no one will tell them what to do” (ibid.).

None of the reasons given by the Principal indicated that there were problems at the Tsumkwe Primary School itself; the reasons were located firmly with the Ju’hoansi and their communities. He did include poverty as a reason, noting that the children do not have school uniforms, and may attend school in clothes that are dirty or torn, which they found embarrassing. He noted that others sometimes perceive them as “backwards” in the town because they have neither cell phones nor TVs in their villages – but he then identified this as a lack on their part that interfered with their “adaptation” process.

When asked what he thought would be a solution to the problems of children from the Village Schools dropping out of Tsumkwe, the principal first proposed the provision of school uniforms. He then put the responsibility on the Village Schools teachers, saying that they must enforce *rules* “so that the learners know what they are going to be exposed to at Tsumkwe.” They must also be consistent in their teaching, to accustom the children to coming to school regularly. The parents must be “made aware that it is important for the learners to study and become educated”, and they must support their children. Finally, he suggested, the age of entry must be restricted. No alternatives were suggested for the students who are too old but still want to take classes. When asked what changes he suggested could be made at TPS, he said that the teachers could be more friendly and understanding of the Ju’hoansi children – but he had no suggestions how this would be done specifically.

Although the principal's "cultural deprivation" perspective was far from unique; as the head of the school to which the Ju'l'hoansi children were supposed to transfer after attending the Village Schools for three years, he was the person in the position to have the most control over the circumstances at TPS.⁵ Instead, he puts the emphasis on the problems with the Ju'l'hoan teachers, the attitude of the parents, problematic aspects of the culture and undesirable effects on the children. These are all reasons that are commonly cited by others in positions of authority as explanations for why the Ju'l'hoansi children drop out of school. That the school environment at Tsumkwe might be problematic is very rarely noted. Although poverty is clearly identified as a problem, it is again a problem located with the children and their families – not with the school. The solutions offered by this approach include the provision of material items – which are certainly much appreciated, but do not solve the problem long-term. Where there is a change to be made, it is generally expected that this should take place within the home culture of the student – not at the school.

The principal's perspective contains some interesting and important parallels with other perspectives presented in this and following chapters. He highlighted the resistance of the Ju'l'hoan youth to rules, being told what to do, and getting punished. In fact, characteristics of autonomy and tolerance for individual will are highlighted throughout the ethnographic literature on the Ju'l'hoansi; this will be described in the following chapter. The principal suggests that the Ju'l'hoan children experience the school as a kind of "jail," and attributes this to an upbringing that is devoid of rules – placing the blame on the community, but nonetheless recognizing the discomfort the students experience at the school. In the quote opening this chapter, Kawagley also likens school to a prison in which Yup'ik and other indigenous Alaskan youth were forced to assimilate to the dominant culture during a "12-year sentence" (2001:52). This use of similar imagery from different corners of the world highlights the intersection between structural barriers and the cultural discontinuity between home and school for indigenous students – both of these perspectives will be illustrated in the following chapters.

⁵ This principal was fired in 2014 following accusations of abuse. The previous principal, a woman who occupied this position when I conducted my research in 2001 – 2002, was also fired because of misconduct. It is commonly believed that the principals and teachers assigned to Tsumkwe schools were those who were being 'punished' for bad behavior elsewhere. Although this is of course not official policy, it is widely cited by Tsumkwe residents, including some involved with the school, and sometimes by government officials. The principal hired to replace the most recent one has also been the focus of recent complaints; see the Afterword at the end of this book.

4 The kids' decision: socialization and education

We want them to go to school, but the kids themselves don't want to. We try to get them to go, but it is the kids' decision.

Ju'hoan father and village schools committee member, speaking at a meeting. [Field-notes, March 2002]

Socialization among the Ju'hoansi

Beginning with the Kalahari Research Project, socialization processes, child-rearing approaches, learning and teaching styles, and the communication of traditional knowledge among the Ju'hoansi and other San groups have been a primary or parallel focus of a great deal of research (including Draper 1976; Konner 1976; Blurton Jones and Konner 1976; Marshall 1976; Tanaka 1980; Lee 1979, 2003; Guenther 1976; 1999; Heckler 1991; Bieseke 1993b; Le Roux 1999; Hays 2007). This research over more than half a century has revealed a number of consistent themes that include: a general discouragement of competitive and aggressive behavior; a tolerant child-rearing style that respects individual mood, will, and personality; an absence of physical punishment; an informal socialization process in which children and adults interact freely; observational and participatory (as opposed to instructional) learning styles; a prioritizing of specifics over generalizations; and a higher value accorded to first-hand knowledge as opposed to 'hearsay'.

It is of course important to acknowledge that the Ju'hoansi of Nyae Nyae and other San are no longer living the fairly autonomous hunting and gathering lives that were described by early researchers cited above. More recent research has found, however, that although the situation for the Ju'hoansi is rapidly changing (and the behavior of some is beginning to shift to accommodate this) the deeply held values that maintained social harmony and survival in the past still affect current relationship patterns. I will briefly elaborate these findings below, with an emphasis on the respect for individual will and a lack of coercive approaches to education.

Lack of competition and discouragement of aggressive behavior

Patricia Draper conducted some of the most extensive research specifically concerning socialization among San communities (1972; 1976, also published under Draper-Harpending). She worked with the Ju'hoansi of |Du|da, a water source south of the current Nyae Nyae Conservancy boundary near the border with Botswana. During her visit in 1969, approximately 120 people frequented the camps, with about 30 to 40 people living in

one camp at any given time. The traditionally small band size meant that children had a very close association with all the adults in the band. Furthermore, since there were only a few children at any camp, children played in groups marked by mixed ages and a range of ability levels. Draper points out that, as a result, “competitiveness in games is almost entirely lacking”; she connected an absence of team sports with general cultural values against competitiveness (1976:202). Instead of competitive games, Ju’hoan children engaged in games which involved cooperative effort, and/or in which each child strove to perfect his or her own technique rather than comparing individual performance to that of the other players.

The observations of Lorna Marshall among the Nyae Nyae Ju’hoansi generally support Draper’s. The vast majority of games she documented were not competitive. She notes, however, that children’s games were not entirely conflict-free. Adolescent boys did engage in some combat games, and Marshall describes “four little dramatic games” in which conflict was expressed between children and parents, humans and animals, and between those who have and those who do not have cattle (1976:314; see also Biesele 1993b). She noted that these examples were striking in that they were relatively rare, being the exception rather than the norm. Importantly, this also indicates that the concept of and potential for conflict and competition were not absent from Ju’hoan culture – merely that these were not preferred forms of interaction and were strongly discouraged.



Fig. 14: Women digging roots in Nyae Nyae, in 2001

The general lack of aggressive behavior often noted as a characteristic of San people (Marshall 1976: Thomas 1989) is described in detail by Draper, who notes that at the time of her research, the Jul'hoansi of !Dulda had "explicit values against [physically] assaulting, losing control, and seeking to intimidate another person ... [O]vert physical acts by one person against another are extremely rare" (1978:33).



Fig. 15: A mother watches as her daughter practices holding a pencil (2001)

This did not mean that violence never occurred among San groups. Lee describes different levels of conflict that he has observed among the Jul'hoansi, beginning with "talking," or verbal argument and abuse, escalating to "fighting" without weapons and then to "deadly fighting" with poison arrows or other weapons (2013:126). At each level, onlookers attempt to prevent the conflict from escalating, often through the use of humor or physical separation (either forcibly by others or by withdrawal on the part of those fighting). Often these methods are successful, but they did not always work; Lee documented 22 murders within a 35-year period spanning from 1920 to 1955 (2013:128). Thus although the San are often characterized as "peaceful" or "pas-

sive," it is not correct to suggest that San children *naturally* avoid aggressive behavior or that, as adults, violent urges are absent. Violence is generally discouraged, and the response of adults to aggressive behavior among children – to separate fighting children before a fight escalates – socializes children to withdraw rather than to fight; this socialization process is reinforced by the relative absence of physical punishment of children.

Also absent, according to Draper, was "moral indoctrination about the right and the wrong way to do things or deal with other people" (1978:33). She notes that adults were completely tolerant of aggression directed by a child at an adult, and of children's temper tantrums: "adults consistently ignore a child's angry outburst when it does not inflict harm" (37). This tolerance for verbal outbursts extended to the behavior of adults. While physical aggression was avoided, "verbal aggression is commonplace among the [Jul'hoansi]" (41). She links this verbal aggression to the cultural values against putting oneself above others:

Pride and boastfulness are especially devalued ... personal success, excellence, achievement, or sheer luck must be handled delicately in this society, for the potential put-down is everywhere.” [ibid., 41]

This characteristic has been described by Lee as “insulting the meat,” which he characterizes as one of the “central practices of the [Ju’hoansi] that serve to maintain egalitarianism” (2013:57). His quote of a Ju’hoan healer from [Xai|xai, Botswana sums it up, linking the importance of maintaining social equality and controlling violence:

When a young man kills much meat, he comes to think of himself as a chief or a big man, and he thinks of the rest of us as his servants or inferiors. We can’t accept this. We refuse one who boasts, for someday his pride will make him kill somebody. So we always speak of his meat as worthless. In this way we cool his heart and make him gentle. [ibid.]

The desire to put oneself above others is clearly something that people are aware – and very wary – of. Ju’hoan individuals are thus strongly discouraged from engaging in aggrandizing behavior. Sanctions are frequently enforced through a process of belittling, criticizing and chastising – a practice which can take quite verbally aggressive forms (see also Wiessner 2005).

In summary, the socialization processes described by Draper and supported by other research among the Ju’hoansi and other San groups, include a relative lack of competitive behavior in everything from children’s games to adult work activities, and a strong aversion to physical aggression (Lee 1979, 2013; Marshall 1976; Tanaka 1980; Thomas 1989). These values are upheld both by social mechanisms and environmental factors (such as small group size). Other than discouraging physical violence and boastful behavior, however, attitudes towards children and their behavior are generally extremely tolerant.

Childhood, work, and learning

Draper notes that children did “amazingly little work,” with adolescents doing the *least* of any age class (1976:213). Adults did not seek help from children while engaging in tasks, except perhaps to ask them to fetch a needed item. Children who could be easily carried (up to the age of about three years) were brought along with their mothers everywhere, including on long gathering trips. Older children were free to accompany adults on gathering or hunting trips, but often they chose not to. Until they reached their mid-teens, youth were free to choose the activities that they wished to engage in. Although they were not “working” in the sense of actively contributing to the subsistence of the group, they were, through their play, modeling of adult behavior, and “peripheral participation” (cf. Lave and

Wenger 1991), accumulating the skills and knowledge that they would need to perform life-sustaining tasks as adults.

Draper points out that there are good reasons for this socialization process. Although the hunting and gathering lifestyle is *technologically* simple, this simplicity can be deceptive, for the subsistence *activities* themselves are quite complex – “it is so uncomplicated that it is easy to overlook the fact that the food-getter must be a mature adult” (1976:216). In more complex societies, food production is broken down into tasks that can be carried out by individuals of varying levels of competence. This is especially true for agricultural and pastoral societies (who make up most of Namibia’s population), where children can participate in maintenance chores such as taking care of animals or weeding the crops (Draper 1976). In hunting and gathering societies, the process of food gathering requires detailed and integrated knowledge about a large variety of plant and animal species and sophisticated problem-solving skills (see below). Furthermore, the activity itself can be dangerous. Deadly snakes, carnivores, elephants and other dangerous animals populate a relatively undifferentiated bush environment; getting disoriented and lost could mean death. There was thus little work that children could do on their own until they were fully competent adults; until that time they accompanied the adults, observing and learning, according to their own desire to do so, and with increasing frequency as they matured.

Although it is often assumed that hunting is a male activity and that women do most of the gathering, both men and women do learn the skills and knowledge associated with the activity of the opposite gender. Men participate in gathering, and when they are out for long hours or even days on a hunt they gather plant foods for sustenance. Likewise, when women are out gathering they must also be able to read animal signs. They pay attention to animal tracks to avoid encounters with dangerous animals and to report game movements to the men (Draper 1976). Furthermore, women do track and hunt with men, more often than is traditionally recognized (Biesele and Barclay 2001). Below, I briefly highlight research describing how both plant and animal knowledge are acquired.

Learning botanical knowledge

Historically, knowledge of plants was extremely important for Ju’hoan groups, with up to 80% of the diet coming from this source. Marshall describes the way botanical knowledge was obtained:

[T]heir training in botany, like all [Ju’hoan] training, is gained by participation and observation, not by formal schooling and not apart from doing. It begins in early childhood. Mothers always carry their nursing infants and young children with them on a gathering day. Visual impressions are implanted in the children. When the chil-

dren can walk, they play at digging and picking and carrying the food in imitation of their mothers. [1976:95–96]

Marshall notes that they also received some teaching and describes a mother actively showing her child an edible tuber and repeating to the child the word of the root, but such teaching was not the only – or primary – way by which information was transmitted. As children got older, they began to participate in gathering, but only “spontaneously and sporadically” (ibid.). As they were ready, they chose when and how they wished to participate in the subsistence activities of the group. In this self-motivated fashion, with virtually no direct pressure from their parents or other adults, by the time they were in their early teens both boys and girls were competent at finding and recognizing plant foods, and by young adulthood they were, as Marshall described them, “fully competent botanists” and gatherers of edible and useful plants (ibid.).

Learning to track and hunt

Blurton Jones and Konner describe the “sheer volume of knowledge” that Ju’hoan hunters possessed, their “accuracy of observation,” and the “elegant logic of deduction from tracks” (1976:348). They compare the intellectual processes required for tracking to those associated with modern science:

In effect, there is a set of problems to be solved by the hunters over the course of several hours or days, and these problems re-present themselves continually ... Answering these questions requires adducing evidence concerning time of year; time of day; heat; wind direction; terrain; depth, shape and displacement of tracks; condition of feces; condition and displacement of grass, twigs, and shrubs along the spoor; amount, position, and color of blood on the ground, grass and bushes; and the store of knowledge concerning the behavior of different prey species. [342]

The authors conclude that this kind of intellectual process, which we associate with modern science or detective work, is “a basic feature of human mental life” (ibid. 343). Others have argued that the skills associated with hunting and gathering are sophisticated and modern in their own rights, and Louis Liebenberg has made similar comparisons: “The art of tracking, as practiced by contemporary trackers of the Kalahari, is a science that requires fundamentally the same intellectual abilities as modern physics and mathematics” (1990:73; see also Hitchcock et al. 1996).

Blurton Jones and Konner were initially surprised at the absence of “powerful theories about animal behavior” among the Ju’hoansi (1976:346). They suggest as the most likely interpretation that the nature of the data required “a greater respect for facts and for the diversity of life than for attempts to explain them in a simple way” (ibid.). In other words,

it is far more critical for hunters to know the specifics of species behavior than to generalize a behavior to a broad range of animals when it may not apply to all. Blurton Jones and Konner also emphasize that the Ju'hoan men they interviewed made a clear distinction between that which one knows to be true from experience, and that which one has heard from others. They report that the Ju'hoansi demonstrated an “advanced ability to observe and assemble facts about behavior and to discriminate facts from hearsay and interpretation” (344). The process of learning how to hunt, like learning botanical knowledge, is one that begins in early childhood:

Little boys play with tiny bows and arrows from the time they can walk and practice shooting throughout their childhood. At adolescence they begin to hunt with their fathers. They learn the skills of tracking and stalking and begin to participate in actual hunts. [Marshall 1976:130]

Blurton Jones and Konner’s observations support the findings of both Marshall and Draper. They note that there seemed to be “relatively little transmission of *information* from one man to another, even from old to young” (1976:344; emphasis added). These authors found that much knowledge was gained “informally” and suggest that, as such, it was “assimilated more easily and rapidly than knowledge gained under pressure or direct instruction” (345). These characteristics of oral knowledge transmission are explored further below.



Fig. 16: Youth from Dau Pos village follow an elder to the dry pan to look for tracks in the mud, in 2009

Folklore and oral knowledge transmission

Bieseles identifies oral transmission of information through folklore as the key to communicating the environmental knowledge, technical skills, and corresponding social values highlighted by Blurton Jones and Konner. She describes the effectiveness of Jul'hoan folklore as a technique for communicating the sophisticated information necessary for survival as hunters and gatherers. Since "most of Bushman technology is carried in the mind as information and technique ... rather than in the hands or on the back," reproduction of this "technology of the mind" is critical (1993b:10). The social forms needed both to communicate and to practice these skills are a critical component:

Subsistence technologies are information-intensive and demand both skill and cooperation. So expressive forms are important in codifying both attitudes like reciprocal sharing as well as a great volume of subsistence information ... folklore and other forms of narrative ... provide a scaffolding upon which explicit information about resources can be vividly and memorably hung. [42]

The narrative form functions as a mnemonic device, while also allowing for open-endedness and flexibility. Space is created for the contributions of different individuals, thus ensuring that the broadest possible knowledge base is encoded and transmitted. Bieseles describes Jul'hoan folklore as encoding a pragmatic and probabilistic philosophy which is

based on respect for the multiplicity of specific pieces of information about the environmental relationships on which life depends. The need for knowledge of many species, and of specific cases of animal and plant behavior rather than general rules, is met among hunter-gatherers by a healthy respect for detail. [54]

These findings reinforce those of Blurton Jones and Konner. Bieseles extends these observations to the communication of social values: in Jul'hoan folklore, the main interest is in the characters' responses to specific situations (environmental and social) "rather than in general rules which may be abstracted from them" (*ibid.*). This makes for an approach to individuals that differs markedly from other forms of social organization, and that has significant bearing upon approaches to education.

Approach to individuals

Despite the strong pressure to conform in certain ways, primarily in maintaining the egalitarian ethic and not putting oneself above others, most San communities are in fact extremely tolerant of individual personality, will, and actions. Bieseles links a general lack of prescriptive rules for social conduct to the overall preference for "detailed familiarity with the pattern of relationships", rather than generalizations (55). This is communicated

through the countless forms and versions of oral narratives in which “no one final answer is given to the question of how to behave; rather, the consequences of good and bad choices are delineated in many contexts” (ibid.).

Mathias Guenther links both the “indulgent” nature of San child-rearing practices and relative lack of competition to a general approach to personality across San cultures that is highly respectful of individual differences and personal autonomy. He suggests that this tolerance is adaptive as “individualism is allowed free rein in the child, so that a wide range of personalities is created across the different families and bands” (1999:51). Furthermore, he suggests that such an approach “may act as a psychological mechanism in the development of personal autonomy, as the standard of evaluating one’s performance ... would be placed within oneself” (52). These characteristics will be elaborated below as they relate to the formal school environment. First, I will give one more example of a specific learning context in Jul’hoan culture, and reflect upon the pedagogical strategies and goals it illustrates.

Learning to heal

Richard Katz describes what may be the most formalized learning within Jul’hoan culture, the process of learning to achieve the state of altered consciousness associated with healing. This state is called *!kia* and is achieved by entering into a trance induced through rhythmic dancing, clapping, drumming and vocalizations. Katz describes *!kia* and the associated dance as fulfilling a number of social functions. It is the primary form of religious expression and provides healing, protection, and a way of coping with illness and other misfortune; it is a mechanism for social cohesion and solidarity; and it functions as a release valve for individual and communal hostility. Unlike in most societies, this important medical and spiritual role was not only practiced by a handful of specialists; among the Jul’hoansi, a fairly large portion of the population learned this skill. According to Katz, during the time of his research in Botswana in 1969, approximately half the older adult males and one third of the adult women learned to achieve the altered state of *!kia* (1976:285). This involves entering into a trance state in which one experiences *n|um* – a “boiling energy” that rises up through the body; the individual has an experience of death and rebirth. During the process, the individual experiences profound fear, and with it, pain. When one learns to overcome this fear and pain, one can begin to heal (1976; 1982).

Katz identifies several important phases in the process of achieving this skill. As children, both boys and girls imitate the dance, first modeling behavior through play, then learning more as they mature. The next preparatory phase is seeking; the young man or woman must be willing and feel that they are ready for the experience, and choose on their own accord to enter into the process, and actively participate in the dances. The “teacher”

is a master of the !kia process who helps to guide the student through a difficult (and often terrifying) transition and then continues to guide the student to use their newfound energy for healing. Katz notes that most of the learning takes place during the dance, and that the emphasis is on the student preparing himself for the experience, not on the role of the teacher in “providing” the experience for him. Furthermore, Katz argues that in learning to experience this state of transcendence and to harness that energy for healing, the emphasis is not so much on the achievement of transcendence, but on what effect the experience has on one’s life. For the Ju’hoansi, the achievement itself is only one part of an integral and ongoing process of individual and social life. Although almost all boys tried to achieve !kia, Katz notes that only about half ultimately succeeded – but, importantly, no stigma was attached to failure (Katz et al. 1997).

Ju’hoan pedagogy

Bieseles provides what is perhaps the most succinct summary of Ju’hoan knowledge transmission. She could as well have been describing a modern pedagogical ideal:

[Ju’hoan education] involves no rote learning or teacher/learner roles; instead, knowledge is acquired ... in relaxed times when the pressure is off. Information is accumulated additively, and individuals benefit from the contributions of many others rather than of a single teacher. Free flow of information characterizes the casual social contexts in which learning takes place ... a system which makes optimum use of what might be called ‘group knowledge’ by making information-exchange both routine and enjoyable. [1993b:43 – 44]

There are a few key elements to this description. One is the contrast between learning by instruction, and participatory learning. Compare Bieseles’s description above with Lave and Wenger’s summary of their concept of situated learning within a community of practice:

[R]ather than learning by replicating the performances of others or by acquiring knowledge transmitted in instruction, we suggest that learning occurs through centripetal participation in the learning curriculum of the ambient community. [1991:100]

As described by many ethnographers, Ju’hoan children and youth were self-motivated learners, gradually moving through varying levels of legitimate peripheral participation, towards full participation in a community of practice as trackers, hunters, botanists, gatherers, and healers. Very little was transmitted through direct instruction, but was communicated through actions and through stories (Bieseles 1993b). The most direct instruction or guidance is given at the time when the learner is ready for the information and can use it im-

mediately – what James Paul Gee calls access to information “just in time” (2004:65). Lave and Wenger’s summary of their concept of situated learning meshes well with Bieseles’s summary of Ju’hoansi teaching and learning styles.

In Katz’ description of how Ju’hoansi learned to achieve the powerful healing state of *!kia*, the learning process is initiated by the young people themselves. The masters of the skill do not function primarily to provide information, but rather as models of how a skill is enacted and used, and as guides through the learning processes. Furthermore, learning for this skill “always occurs in context” (1976:298), and the emphasis is on integrating what one has learned into an ongoing quest for knowledge and understanding. The focus is on the process, not on outcomes. Katz emphasizes that there was no stigma attached to not succeeding; likewise, I find among the Nyae Nyae Ju’hoansi no stigma attached to those individuals who dropped out of the process of education (at whatever level they were at) without actually “achieving” the designated milestones, such as finishing a school year, graduating to another level, or obtaining a certificate or diploma.

As described above, Guenther suggests that the socialization strategies of the Ju’hoansi cultivate internal motivation and standards of evaluation (1999). Internal motivation is also strongly linked to enjoyment of learning. Blurton Jones and Konner identify a genuine curiosity and interest in learning about animal behavior and other related phenomena and suggest that this is one of the elements that makes their knowledge reproduction strategies so effective (1976). Bieseles also points to the link between pleasure and effective learning, noting that Ju’hoan oral literature “combines instruction with pleasure at a level that is very gratifying, and thus very memorable” (1993b:61). Thus, in a number of ways, the pedagogical approach of the Ju’hoansi and other San seems to correspond closely with the findings how human beings learn most efficiently. Perhaps this should not come as a surprise if we take a long-term perspective:

Hunters and gatherers long perpetuated their complex cultures through informal educational systems, honed through the millennia, with high ratios of adults to children and learning activities that took place throughout the days, weeks, months, years of their living together on the land. If tenure on the planet is used as a means of measuring educational success, it might be argued that Western education has yet to meet the high educational achievement rates of hunting/gathering societies. [Heckler 2002:2]

Hunter-gatherers in transition

All of the characteristics of learning described above differ markedly from assumptions that influence the approach of formal education, including Namibian government schools.

Below, I draw upon my own and others' more recent research to highlight some ways in which the learning approaches of the Ju!'hoansi differ from assumptions about 'schooling,' the approach of the government school, and how this affects the ability of Ju!'hoan students to transfer from the Village Schools to the government school in Tsumkwe. I compare these qualities with those found in other hunting and gathering societies, who experience many of the same problems that the Ju!'hoansi do in formal education systems.

Some of the researchers cited in this chapter have noted that when the Ju!'hoansi become sedentary, some characteristics described above begin to change; children do more work, venture further from their homes, and their relationships with adults begin to shift (Draper and Cashdan 1988; Lee 2013). In her regional survey on education among San communities in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, Le Roux found that in some places San parents were beginning to use corporal punishment as a form of discipline; often they linked this explicitly with the need for children to get used to such discipline in order that they are ready for the environment of the government schools (though they also complained greatly about teachers beating their children; 2000). In general, increasing levels of violence are also linked to a number of interconnecting factors, including the use and abuse of alcohol, overcrowding and people's inability to simply "move away" or otherwise withdraw from problematic neighbors. Increasing disparity in wealth triggers deep feelings of resentment and jealousy that cannot be easily resolved within cultural norms.

If the situation for the Ju!'hoansi is rapidly changing, and the behavior of some is beginning to shift to accommodate this, the deeply held beliefs that maintained social harmony and survival in the past are changing more slowly. Barnard, describing what he calls "the foraging mode of thought," has argued that an ideology of sharing (among other things) "persists among part-time and former foragers" (2000:7) even when they become more sedentary. The ideology and economic strategy of sharing is linked to a variety of other social ideals, including what Richard Lee and others have described as "fierce egalitarianism" – an equality that is closely guarded and strongly enforced by the group. Among the Ju!'hoansi, social enforcement of egalitarian ideals is still very much in place, but there is a wide gap between these and the behavior that is rewarded in – and needed to participate and survive in – mainstream society and its institutions.

Ju!'hoan learning and formal schooling

As has already been noted, there is a host of clear and serious reasons why San children leave the government school in Tsumkwe. These include experiences of verbal and physical abuse by teachers and by other students, theft or destruction of property, not understanding

the language of instruction (English), not having appropriate clothes or toiletries, and not getting enough to eat at the school. All of these barriers (discussed in more detail in Chapter 8) must absolutely be addressed if San children are to be expected to attend Tsumkwe school. This is generally agreed upon, even if effective measures have not been taken. However, the cultural characteristics described above, and how they affect schooling experiences and success are not always as easily recognized by outsiders, or articulated by the Ju!hoansi – it should be noted that Ju!hoansi children themselves do not usually directly attribute dropping out to these cultural differences. Nonetheless, these “invisible” reasons (cf. Hymes 1980; see also Phillips 1983) can be identified, and made more apparent. I will start with some general observations.

Cooperation

As described earlier in the chapter, in Ju!hoan culture, individuals do not strive to place themselves above others; to the contrary, such ranking is actively discouraged and Ju!hoansi tend to avoid standing out from the group. In such a cultural environment, the mainstream education system, which ranks children’s performance hierarchically and expects direct demonstration of expertise by individual students, is in conflict with accepted social behavior in their communities. The contrast between Ju!hoan and the mainstream models of education was vividly illustrated for me in 2000 when I witnessed an evaluation of Ju!hoan mother tongue educational materials, conducted by representatives from Namibia’s Ministry of Education and the materials producer.

During this evaluation in one of the village schools, the Ju!hoan teacher was asked to choose a group of students to demonstrate their use of the materials for the visitors, in front of their peers and the teacher. One of the evaluators, recognizing that the students chosen were those who were the most comfortable with the materials, requested loudly and clearly that the *slowest* learners be asked to come forward. The teacher reluctantly selected a few (noticeably smaller) students who came to the front of the class, and one of them was then assigned to demonstrate her skill with the materials. The girl, clearly lacking confidence in her ability to perform the task, stood nervous and unmoving in front of the board with Ju!hoansi words on it. All the students, and the teacher, appeared very uncomfortable, and one of the other students quickly came forward and began to help her. As he was doing so, the evaluator told the other students that they were not allowed to help, that the boy must go back to his seat, and that the girl must do it on her own. The Ju!hoan teacher translated, the boy sat down, and the girl did not produce the answer on her own.

Following this incident, in the car driving out of the village, the evaluators voiced concern about the way the teacher was using the materials, and whether the learners were

actually learning as they were supposed to. The evaluation technique of demanding individual demonstration of skill by students was seen as standard procedure. But the quick and seemingly automatic reaction of the older boy to help his classmate had indicated a lack of familiarity with an educational model in which a child is expected to publicly fail or succeed completely on her own. His response was an example of the tendency for Ju'hoansi to work together in problem solving tasks, the more skilled students assisting the younger ones. The insistence of the evaluators on the demonstration of one shy child, who clearly had not mastered the skill and did not wish be singled out in such a way, conflicted with the Ju'hoansi respect for individual autonomy and the pace of an individual's learning process.

The Village Schools are supposed to be preparing the children for Tsumkwe school. A Ju'hoan child who has completed Grade 3 at a Village School is familiar with an environment in which the students are allowed to help each other, and the teachers and other students speak their language. In Grade 4, at TPS, they may be asked by a non-Ju'hoans teacher to complete a problem at the board in front of the class (one that also includes many new children from other, dominant ethnic groups, whose language they do not know). Can the Village Schools provide a culturally appropriate and safe place for children to learn, and simultaneously prepare them for contradictory social expectations and the intimidating environment at the Tsumkwe School? This is an example of the complicated transition process that the teachers, the children, and their communities are struggling to negotiate – I will return to this in later chapters.

Qualities of knowledge

In their description of Ju'hoan trackers, Blurton Jones and Konner emphasize a focus on diversity and the specifics of animal (and plant) species rather than generalizations, and a strong tendency to prioritize observed facts over hearsay and interpretation (1976). Biesele points out that these characteristics extend to the Ju'hoansi's approach to individuals and to social behavior, and this matches my observations (1993). The Ju'hoansi I have spent time with avoid making generalizations about people's behavior and motivations, and when they do make them, temper them with statements emphasizing that each person has his (or her) own reasons, and we cannot assume to know them. People are also very clear when they are giving information about something that they did not experience or witness themselves; always prefacing this information with "I don't know but I heard that ...". Overall, Ju'hoansi are very reluctant to speak on behalf of others, or to provide information without first consulting others.

At government schools, decontextualized information with which learners have little or no experience is filtered through a teacher who, in the case of the Ju'hoan learners at the

Tsumkwe schools and San elsewhere in the region, is almost always a member of a culture very different from their own. Most of the books and other materials used are standard educational materials used throughout Namibia, and the depictions of people and situations very rarely match the daily life of the Ju/'hoansi in Nyae Nyae. The Village Schools are progressive in their efforts to rectify this gap by using locally generated materials and stories (alongside standard books, posters, and other materials) but little, if any, of this is in use at the government school in Tsumkwe. This kind of gap between home and life experience and classroom materials creates problems for children of any culture. The Ju'hoan emphasis on first-hand knowledge makes the gap more profoundly problematic from a pedagogic perspective.

Flexible approaches to education

The excerpt from my fieldnotes in the introduction to this book provides a telling snapshot of the children, their activities, and their relationship with TJSS, and contributes some interesting and important insights into some of the broader patterns. During my fieldwork, I have frequently noted that Ju'hoan children and adolescents who described themselves as "going to school" might choose not to attend school on a particular day, or for a week or longer. I would often meet students who were "supposed" to be in Tsumkwe when I visited the surrounding villages. One day in 2002, I came across a boy that I knew was in Grade 4 at Tsumkwe, playing a guitar in ||Auru, one of the villages with a Village School. I asked him if he had left the school in Tsumkwe. No, he said, he had come home for vacation, maybe he would go back go back Sunday or Monday. When I pointed out that vacation actually started the following week, he said, nonchalantly, that in that case he would just stay for another week in the village. I asked him how things were going at school and he said they were going fine – he liked school. And the teacher? The teacher is fine, he said. "The only problem is that he doesn't like us to be absent" (Fieldnotes April 2002).

Another Ju'hoan boy, whom I saw frequently, was around twelve years old and lived in a village near Tsumkwe. He had attended one of the Village Schools for Grades 1 to 3, and then went to Tsumkwe School for Grade 4 in 2000. He dropped out after a few weeks and returned to the Village School for another year, and then started Grade 4 again in Tsumkwe in 2001. By the time I met him in 2002, he was in Grade 5; he was one of the very few who had made it through Grade 4. He was a lively friendly boy who spoke English much better than most children his age, and I spoke with him often about his schooling. He always gave me a big smile and said that it was going well and that he liked it. His fifth Grade teacher provided additional information: "He is extremely intelligent," she said, "the best one in the class" – but the problem was that he often did not attend school, or left for break in the mid-

dle of the day and did not return. When I asked him about this, he gave me his usual bright smile, shrugged, and said, “sometimes I like to go out into the bush” (Fieldnotes, April 2002). When I caught up with him again in 2009, he was around 19 and had long ago dropped out of school and was living in his village hunting and helping his parents.

While the Ju’hoan children do not seem to see this irregular attendance as problematic, their teachers and the principal obviously do have a problem with it. Children who attend irregularly, or who leave for a while and then come back, are ultimately informed that they can no longer attend the school. Children sometimes indicate feelings of surprise or indignation when describing this dynamic, sometimes they are matter-of-fact about it, and sometimes they give this as their reason for dropping out entirely. Many do keep trying, like the boy described in Chapter 1 who had left to visit his sick father and been told to leave, but was now “ready to try again.” This boy was “trying again” at least three years after his earlier experience; he was by then far older than the traditional age for Grade 4. It often happens that children “try” taking the same grades over (especially Grade 4, if they have been to the Village Schools). Although technically they are not allowed to repeat grades indefinitely, movement between the Village Schools and Tsumkwe leaves room for some flexibility. Eventually, however, students become too old and are rejected on that basis.



Fig. 17: Children from Auru Village School drum and dance during a break from school, in 2014

Age and school attendance

[A]t Auru yesterday, I saw a young girl who had started this year in Grade 4 – but I found out yesterday that she went back to her village. The parents came to me with the kid asking me whether I can allow the learner to repeat Grade 3 at the village school. Then I said, ‘No. She cannot repeat Grade 3. She has to proceed – she is in Grade 4.’ I have to talk nicely to them and explain that it cannot happen like that because, next year, her age will be higher. The years will just keep going up, and then she cannot continue. [Cwi, Principal of the Village Schools, interview July 2010]

Although not often recognized as a serious factor, strict age cut-offs for formal education are very problematic for Ju’hoan students, many of whom start late, sometimes miss years, and repeat grades until eventually they are considered too old for the grade level that they are in. Very many Ju’hoansi that I spoke with had continued to “try” until they were in their mid-to-late teens – or even early twenties – at which point they were told that they were too old to be in primary school. Thus, the age at which they were compelled to give up on their formal school career coincides with the age at which, traditionally, they would be coming into their own as a member of the community, able to fully participate in the subsistence activities of the group. For some young Ju’hoansi, especially those from villages where people continue to practice many traditional skills, this may be the age at which they let go of the idea of schooling altogether and begin to assume an adult role within their community. For those who genuinely wish to continue with their studies, however, it is precisely at the age when they are socially ready to fully commit to the process that they are expelled from the formal education system.

It is important to point out here that the label “dropout” was rarely a self-ascription. The school officials and others apply this term, which usually has negative connotations, to students who had begun the school year but stopped attending. The Ju’hoansi students themselves seem to view school attendance as a process, which they themselves can take charge of; their choices about what activity to engage in might vary from day to day. In fact, the sporadic school attendance of Ju’hoan youth was in keeping with their general approach to participation in daily activities, and with an economic strategy that values flexibility – a point that I will come back to in later chapters.

Non-coercive approaches

One important, and related, underlying characteristic of Ju’hoan approaches to socialization, discipline, and learning is the avoidance of coercive techniques. This characteristic has been pointed out by anthropologists working with hunting and gathering groups the world over, who describe a deeply entrenched cultural value of individual autonomy – people de-



Fig. 18: Pre-school teachers at ||Xa|oba play jump rope with the Village School learners in 1998

cide for themselves how they spend their time. (Schweitzer et al. 2000; Hewlett and Lamb, 2005). One explanation for this is that foraging subsistence strategies, including hunting and gathering, require flexibility (Briggs 2000) and adaptability in order to maximize access to resources when they are available.

The desire of children to be somewhere other than school is rarely, if ever, considered by outsiders to be a legitimate excuse for irregular attendance. Most non-San, when presented with the idea during formal interviews or casual conversations, respond to the effect that children *everywhere* do not want to go to school – this is exactly why they must be forced to go, either by their parents or by the government. Herein lies a fundamental difference between the approach of formal education and that of the Jul’hoansi. The notion of learning as something unpleasant but necessary that one has to be *forced* to do seems to be quite alien to Jul’hoan culture. For children who have been raised in a tolerant community that respects individual children’s decisions about how they spend their time – and trusts them to make good decisions and to become competent adults – the transition to an environment where they are expected to be in the same place at the same time every day is met with resistance. This is especially true when this place is an unpleasant one, as Tsumkwe school is usually described to be.

As with the characterizations of the Jul’hoansi as non-violent and egalitarian, the emphasis on respect for individual autonomy should not be understood to mean that the *concept*

of force is absent from Jul'hoan language or culture. The word *#'un#uan*¹ means to (try to) force someone to do something they are resisting doing. This word might be used to describe the insistence that a girl marry a particular man, even if she does not want to; people might also force someone to go out and hunt, or to look for work. The fact that it exists as a concept and a practice in Jul'hoan society does not mean that it is the preferred form of interaction, however, or that it was usually successful.² In fact, among the Jul'hoansi, efforts to impose one's will on someone else are usually met with very strong resistance, often leading to conflict.

Sometimes, parents said that they were going to "try to force" their children to go to school. Although this seems at first to contradict the understanding of Jul'hoan educational styles as non-coercive, the way in which this option was presented reaffirms the traditionally non-forceful style and underlines the cultural shift that people feel they are being "forced" to make. Parents mention "forcing" as a last resort (possibly something that they have been told they have to do – see below), or else as a strategy that has been tried and proven unsuccessful. I never heard a parent say that their child was in school because they had forced them to be there, and only very rarely did a Jul'hoan student say that a parent – or anyone else – had forced them to be there.³ In interviews with Jul'hoansi who had done well at school, they would quite often say that they had forced themselves.

Summary: Jul'hoansi education

Jul'hoan children and youth living in their communities can be described as self-motivated learners gradually moving through varying levels of legitimate peripheral participation towards full participation in a community of practice – traditionally as trackers, hunters, botanists, gatherers, and healers. Their occupations are more diversified today, and include tourism-related activities, wage jobs in the town, and participation in various development projects – but traditional skills are still communicated in Nyae Nyae villages (not least because these are economically viable – see chapter 10). The approach to individual learning choices as described by Katz (1976) still apply. The decision to participate in a learning process is initiated by the young people themselves, and the masters of the skill function primarily as models of how a skill is enacted and used. Furthermore, the learning is contextualized, and the emphasis is not on *achievement* itself, but on integrating what one has

¹ I verified this word with Leon Tsamkxao, who checked Jul'hoan language experts and elders before confirming this spelling, and the sense in which it is used (Tsamkxao, personal comment, May 2015).

² For example, girls are known to successfully resist "forced" marriages, see Shostak (1981).

³ In my research, only those who had a parent or a relative from another ethnic group ever gave this response.

learned into an ongoing quest for knowledge and understanding. As I have already noted, among the Nyae Nyae Ju'hoansi, there is virtually no stigma attached to "failure", and people are free to continue learning and trying new skills for as long as they choose.

The issue of *coercion* provides an example of where the "cultural discontinuity" and "structural inequality" theories merge. A core value underpinning Ju'hoan culture is a reluctance to tell others what to do, or claim to know what is best for them. Learning styles, accordingly, are those in which the learner is self-directed, and in which learning is something that people naturally want to do. Once again, this is more than just a cultural difference – it is both a pedagogical concern and a broader social issue. Jim Cummins contrasts coercive approaches with collaborative ones, and argues that relationships within the classroom mirror those in wider society (see also Collins 2009). He argues that "real change in the education of culturally diverse students requires a fundamental shift from coercive to collaborative relations of power" (1996:17). This will have to take place on many levels – but one important place is in education.

In an early assessment of Ju'hoan learning styles conducted to inform the design of the VSP, Melissa Heckler, a progressive educationalist from the US who helped design the initial project and who has remained involved, notes that the Ju'hoansi follow an educational strategy that is considered ideal in progressive education, characterized by "a high ratio of adults to children [and] activities constantly in process that never excluded children, including: cooking, water collecting, food gathering, fire preparation, craft work, dancing, music making, storytelling and conversation ... children were accorded a respect for their feelings and moods equal to the adults" (1991:8). Children were, Heckler notes, "the authors of their days" (ibid)

The kids' decision

At the start of the 2002 school year, Hanga and I accompanied a Ju'hoan mother on a visit to the principal of the Tsumkwe school. At that time, there was a serious shortage of food at the government school, and Xoan||'an (the mother and school committee member introduced in Chapter 1) asked us to go with her to talk to the principal about this concern.⁴ In her office, with Hanga translating between English and Ju'hoansi, the principal admitted that food was a problem, but encouraged Xoan||'an to tell the children to come back to the school hostel, instead of just "hanging around" in Tsumkwe. The mother responded by bringing up the issue of food again, pointing out that there had also been problems with food delivery the previous year. "This problem with the food happens too often" she said, "I

⁴ This woman was a member of the Village Schools "School Committee" and especially active in educational issues.

don't want this problem to keep coming up – it is difficult to convince the children to go to school when there is no food.” As Hanga was translating what she had said, the vice-principal came into the room. Picking up on the theme of parental responsibility, he addressed the Jul'hoan mother, explaining that

it is not just the Bushman kids who are forced to go to school, all children everywhere in the world are forced to go. The Bushman children must also go, so that they can be a part of Namibia and the rest of the world. You parents must understand why school is important, and you must force your children to go to school. [Fieldnotes January 2002]

Both school officials said that they appreciate parents like her who understand the value of education, and that she must now go and tell the children to come and stay in the hostel and go to school. No solution was provided for the problem of food shortage.

School officials and others place the responsibility of ensuring that the children come to school on the parents – as is the norm for cultures that demand obedience from children. For the Jul'hoansi parents, however, this blame is misplaced – the children will do what they *themselves* are motivated to do, and their main concern is that the school provides an environment that is attractive to them and in which their needs are met, so that the children will attend and learn the valuable skills the school is supposed to provide. Unfortunately, the school environment is often anything but pleasant for the Jul'hoan and other San learners, as has been frequently noted (Le Roux 1999, Suzman 2001, Hays 2007; Thiem and Hays 2014). In general, children's participation in the school is marked by threats – of punishment for poor performance or absenteeism, or beatings and other abuse from teachers and other children at the school. The contrast between this and the tolerant and supportive atmosphere of their home villages is one reason that Jul'hoan students choose to leave the government school in Tsumkwe.

The learning environment in Tsumkwe contrasts deeply in many ways with the values and knowledge of Jul'hoan culture. The teachers, however sympathetic they may be, do not speak the language of the children, and come from a place that is (usually) foreign to them. Students are expected to behave in ways that contradict accepted standards at home, and sometimes what they have experienced at the Village Schools. The teachers communicate information that does not necessarily match the experience of the students (or anyone they know); there is an emphasis on generalization and categorization (of animals, plants, and things). And, finally, there is little room for those who fall too far outside the strict age categorization of formal school. What do Jul'hoan students decide to do about attending such a school? The answer is in the opening quote of this chapter.

A rational response

Cultural issues are not more important than the structural problems the Ju'hoansi and other San have with formal education – including poverty, social stigma, and abuse. However, they are often overlooked, or, when recognized, dramatically oversimplified. From the perspective of many who work to help improve the educational situation for San children and communities, the primary problem is that San students drop out of the formal schools. The emphasis is often upon improving access, making efforts to convince parents that education is important, and occasionally – and to varying degrees of success – trying to make these schools more friendly places for San students. However, I have argued here that Ju'hoan socialization differs from formal schooling in some deep and critical ways, including the type of knowledge that is recognized and valued, strategies for knowledge reproduction, attitudes towards individual choice and will, and the use of threats and rewards as incentives to perform. Compounding these fundamental differences is the strict adherence to age categories within formal education.

One result of these differences is that behavior of Ju'hoan children, parents, and teachers that is completely appropriate to Ju'hoan culture is frequently misinterpreted by outsiders as reflecting a lack of ability, confidence, commitment, or concern. This perspective often blinds school officials and others to the very real concerns the Ju'hoansi do have, and to their efforts and own educational approaches, leaving many problems unaddressed. The quote of a Ju'hoan man that opens the chapter highlights the cultural emphasis on autonomy and self-determination. This is also an important aspect of the structural inequality approach – why are the children “running away”? Heckler and others have described them as “voting with their feet” (2011). Deyhle, quoted in the previous chapter, argues that

[t]he decision to leave school can then be seen, in part, ‘as a rational response to irrelevant schooling; racism; restricted political, social, and economic opportunities; and the desire to maintain a culturally distinct identity.’ [Dayhle 2010: 98]

Three important points stand out in this quote, which we should keep in mind as we consider the educational situation of the Ju'hoansi. One is that the response of Ju'hoansi children to the schools is not simply a whim, it is a “rational response” – this perspective will be supported in the chapters to follow. Furthermore, it is a response in large part to structural barriers (including racism, stigma, lack of access to the labor market, lack of education in their own language, and lack of basic economic necessities needed to attend school). Finally, there is *value* attached to cultural identity – and there is desire to maintain it. For the Ju'hoansi, an important part of this cultural identity is associated with “the bush” and the

skills that are learned, and used, there. The original goal of the Village Schools, which will be described in the next chapter, was to create a situation in which the Ju'hoansi have the opportunity to build upon their own cultural base and to create for themselves an appropriate, effective and sustainable educational approach. The question remains whether the goal of establishing a progressive mother tongue education project, founded in the community ideals and culture, is compatible with the goal of preparing children for a schooling experience that in many ways so deeply contradicts the pedagogic strategies and social values of the home culture – and in which the Ju'hoansi children have so many severe disadvantages. Nonetheless, given that the Village Schools are the only place in southern Africa where San children are taught in their own language for any significant length of time, they represent an important example of an educational alternative for San communities and the challenges that such projects face.

5 We can start under the trees: the Village Schools over 25 years

The first phase of the VSP (1989–1992) was characterized by the challenge of bringing relevant learning experience and literacy to a group of people whose own educational system is integrated into all aspects of life – a people, thus, with high educational standards.

[Bieseke and Hitchcock 2011:237]

The intent is to prepare the Ju|'hoan children and adults for participation in the national education system. The intention is not to develop a separate education system for the Ju|'hoansi.

[Kann 1991:25]

We don't really know how we want our village schools to be. We should not hurry. We should learn as we go ahead. We can start under the trees.

[Ju|'hoan woman quoted in Kann 1991:28]



Fig. 19: Two girls using beer boxes as improvised desks in |Aotca, 1990 (photo courtesy of Melissa Heckler)

Nyae Nyae Village Schools

Timeline of stakeholder involvement

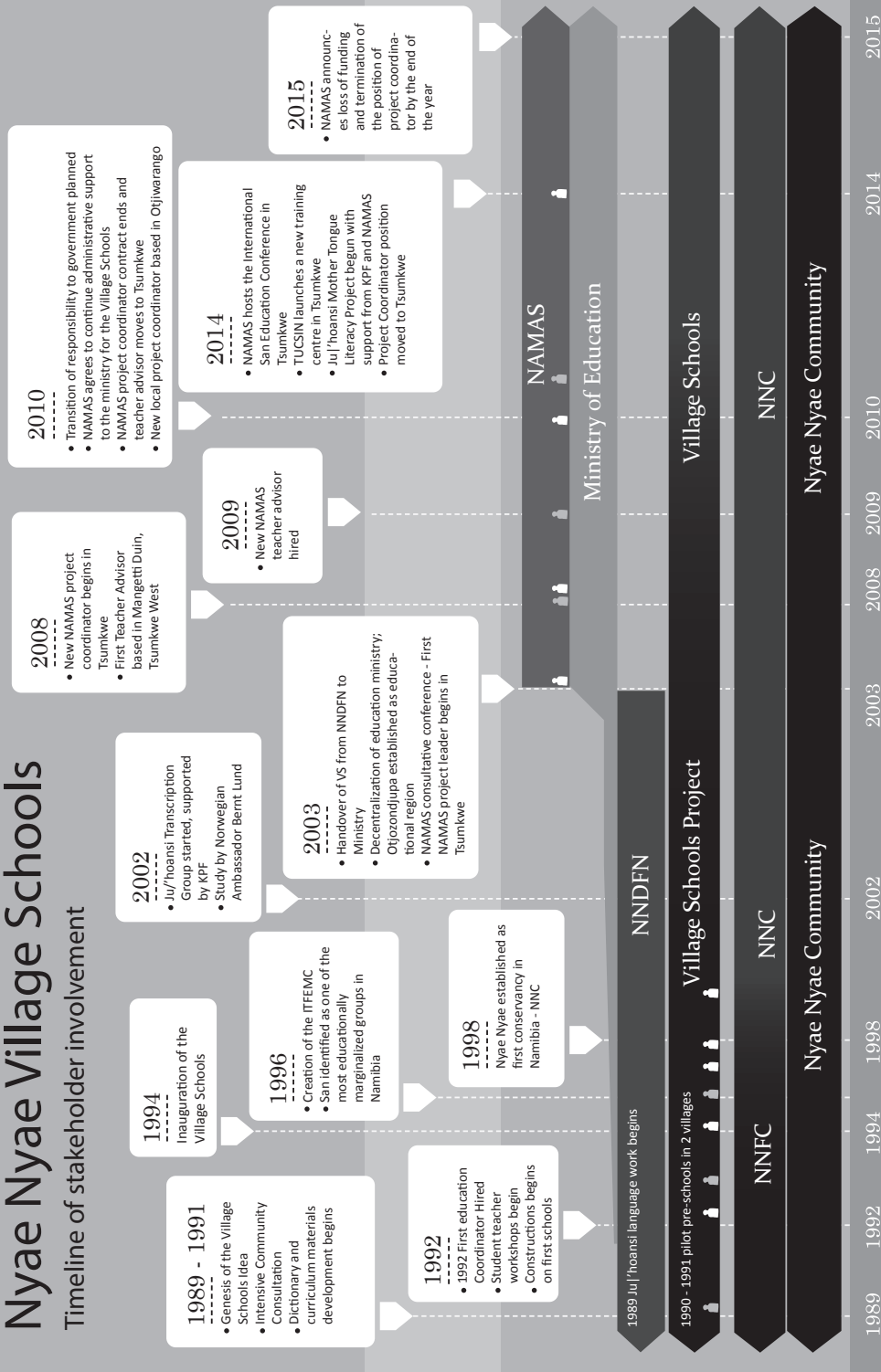


Fig. 20: This timeline shows the significant changes in external stakeholders over the years.

Credit: Bjørn Hatteng, University of Tromsø

Establishment of the Village Schools Project

Prior to Independence in 1990, the school at Tsumkwe had been primarily staffed by Afrikaners (often military personnel), and the educational philosophy, which relied upon rote learning and corporal punishment, was alien to the Ju'hoan approach and the content was irrelevant to the learners. No effort was made to incorporate the Ju'hoan language, or to provide a bridge to the language of instruction, which was Afrikaans. During this time, almost all students ran away in response to physical abuse and poor conditions at the school and hostel, returning to the security of their families. Attendance of Ju'hoan children at the government schools in Tsumkwe district was low and inconsistent, and almost all children who started school dropped out; most did so long before obtaining any certificates (Kann 1991; Pfaffe 1995). The Village Schools Project grew out of a collaborative effort between the NNFC, a grassroots organization that has been since absorbed by the NNC, and the NNDFN, a Windhoek-based support organization, as a response to this high dropout rate among Ju'hoan children. This chapter provides a chronological overview of the schools and the various role-players that have been involved, and identifies key turning points for the community and the schools over the last quarter of a century.

As the timeline (Figure 20) illustrates, the Nyae Nyae community are, of course, the most consistent stakeholder. Other involved individuals and organizations, although clearly committed to the Village Schools process, came and went as contracts ended and financial and administrative responsibility for the Village Schools changed. An important goal of this book is to bring out the ways in which the community is actively engaging with education. They are the ones with the long-term investment in the Village Schools and other education initiatives. Accessing the skills of formal education involves many activities and forms of communication that are out of the range of experience for most Ju'hoansi. A critical part of the story of the development of the Village Schools, particularly in the beginning, is the involvement of key “outsiders” – those who had the skills and knowledge to find funding, communicate with government officials, network with other NGOs, develop language and curriculum materials, provide community-based teacher training, and to integrate the Village Schools into a larger project context. These included, in particular, Bieseles (1992, 1993a), Heckler (1992; 2002), Patrick Dickens¹ (1992, 1994, 2005), Lesley Beake, Ulla Kann (1991), Joachim Pfaffe (1995) and Magdalena Brörmann (1993–1994).² Some of these in-

¹ Patrick Dickens passed away in 1992. By that point, he had created enough materials and trained enough Ju'hoansi to allow for the language development processes to move forward. He is widely credited for the creation of a practical and useable Ju'hoan orthography.

² Of these initial involved outsiders, Megan Bieseles and Melissa Heckler in particular have remained involved over the past decades, and have contributed greatly to educational efforts in the

dividuals are described and cited throughout this book, but it should be noted that during the early years of the project, they were working in close collaboration with the Nyae Nyae community members – Ju!’hoan parents, children and the trainee teachers (as well as other NGOs, Tsumkwe School, and donors).

Late 1980s – Seeding of the Village Schools Project

Bieseles, an anthropologist who has been working with Ju!’hoansi communities in Botswana and Namibia since the 1970s and who is the current director of KPE, was one of those who spearheaded the VSP in the late 1980s, when she was working as program director for the (then) JBDF. In an interview in 2010, Bieseles told the story of how the idea of the Village Schools was born when the JBDF advertised for a horticultural instructor



Fig. 21: Megan Bieseles and Patrick Dickens transcribing stories told by the Ju!’hoan learners in |Aotca, 1990 (courtesy of Melissa Heckler)

region. Although this book is based primarily upon my own research, the insights of Bieseles and Heckler have informed my analysis.

We had a response from Patrick Dickens who had been Mobutu Sese Seko's³ gardener. He had some experience with projects in Botswana and seemed to be perfectly oriented towards being a teacher of horticulture. He knew what was involved, and how to do it in a way that fitted the style of the Ju'hoan people. As I was driving him back to Windhoek [after that first interview and trial visit], he mentioned very modestly that he had some expertise in the Khoe San languages. Six weeks later, he was teaching horticultural lessons in Ju'hoansi. He was brilliant. So Patrick was the beginning of the most fantastic local project that you can imagine. [Interview, 16 July 2010]

Bieseles saw Dickens' combination of skills and personal qualities as an opportunity too good to pass up and – as the program director – made a decision to start with an orthography, a dictionary, and curriculum materials and to work with the Nyae Nyae communities to develop a village schools project. She describes how Dickens “immediately started working with local guys around the edges of the horticulture – they worked on the orthography; they did the dictionary together” (ibid.)⁴

Bieseles and Dickens saw the development of an education project as a necessary response to the community's concerns with the current educational situation and as something that would fit perfectly within the goals and structure of the existing NNFC projects. The community strongly supported the project, for many reasons. The current Chief of the Traditional Authority, Tsamkxao ǀOma, had outlined the possibilities for his community if the children had access to “good schooling”:

Some of them could get work in hospitals, medical work, and some could teach children in schools, and some could be police, and some could work in offices and do secretarial work ... Or they could have shops, or some could learn to work on machines, machines that build trucks, or (welding) machines that work with fire, because these days people don't just do one thing but do lots of kinds of things. Some are truck people and others are welders and some work on truck machines and others keep hostels for school-children. Some could go to work for the Government in another area, maybe in waterworks, or some might be in agriculture, and many of them might want to work in water detection and borehole drilling. If they had a chance to learn these things, they'd know how to do them. My heart burns for them to learn. That's how our work would go forward.” [1987, quoted in Bieseles and Hitchcock 2011:233–234]

Clearly, this Ju'hoan community leader saw the potential of education for their communities, and envisioned the ways in which they could participate in mainstream society if they had access to such education. It is also clear from the above statement that ǀOma was not

³ Mobutu Sese Seko was the President of Zaire (renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1971) from 1965 to 1997.

⁴ Some of these young men who originally developed the language materials are today in the Ju'hoansi Transcription Group – see Chapter 6.

expecting only academic success, but was also focused on practical training and the opportunities this could provide. Unfortunately, “good” education was not available to them in Tsumkwe at that time. They had a serious problem with the government school in particular, where small children had to stay in a hostel far away from home and reported being treated badly:

[T]he Ju’hoansi didn’t like their kids being in a vulnerable position in Tsumkwe, and the kids didn’t like being away from their extended families ... so we came up with the idea of taking the school to the communities. That seemed to be something that the communities could really get behind. [Interview with Bieseles, July 16 2010]

Meanwhile, Dickens was also lobbying in Windhoek to have the official Ju’hoansi orthography changed from the cumbersome one that had been developed by Snyman in 1970 so that they could create a more user-friendly one in its place. Bieseles, Dickens, and Beake, an author of children’s books, sat under baobab trees in Nyae Nyae writing grant proposals, and worked together with the communities to develop the project. Heckler, an educationalist, planned the first school in |Aotcha, and in ||Xa|oba the following year, working closely with community members, in particular a young Ju’hoan man from Botswana named |Ai!ae, also known as Benjamin (Heckler 1991, 1992). Heckler designed a curriculum based around story-telling, reading and village life, and produced learning materials together with the children, which Dickens later incorporated into the language materials he produced with the dictionary group.

Training Ju’hoansi teachers was an integral aspect of the project from the beginning; candidates had to be selected and their current level of qualification assessed. A critical aspect for the communities was that their children would be cared for by relatives, and not by strangers. This meant that the number and placement of the schools had to be strategic, so that as many villages as possible had access to a school – either in their own village, or at a nearby village where relatives lived. Transportation was a question that had to be figured out, as well as food for the students and other key logistical issues. None of these were simple or straightforward. The approaches tried, and challenges faced, are described in following chapters.

1990s – Growth of the Village Schools Project

Training of Ju’hoansi teachers started in 1992 under the first Education Coordinator, Magdalena Brörman, an educationalist with experience in both in-service teacher training for teachers with low formal qualifications, and with San communities from Botswana. The first Village Schools Coordinator, educationalist Joachim Pfaffe, began working in 1993. The inauguration of the Village Schools took place in March 1994, officially opened by

the (then) Minister of Education, Sport and Culture, Nahas Angula⁵ (see fig. 20, p. 92) and it was attended by the Swedish Ambassador, representatives of the US embassy, and the University of Namibia – among other important figures. The inauguration took place over two days, in order to open each of the schools individually. The schools were presented as a unique and important education model – and one that could potentially be replicated in other communities (see also Chapter 10).

The development of the Village Schools was meant to create a safer, more familiar, and more comfortable environment in which the children could learn in their own languages about things relevant to their lives, close to their homes and families. Parents and other relations were expected to participate actively and to incorporate cultural activities and traditional knowledge into the learning experience. Although the focus was on providing schooling closer to home and incorporating the home language, knowledge and skills of the communities, the goal of preparing children to be successful in the government schools was central to the project. The ultimate aim was to increase the self-confidence of the learners and the communities, so that Jul'hoan children could enter the government schools in Grade 4 with a firm grounding in their own culture as well as with other necessary skills to succeed in the mainstream environment. The “cardinal objectives” of the VSP, are outlined in several early annual reports and other documentation are as follows:

- 1) To use the Jul'hoansi language as the medium of instruction;
- 2) To train Jul'hoan teachers as educators of their own people;
- 3) To develop a relevant curriculum and curricular material in consultation with communities;
- 4) To continue building school facilities close to villages so that the young learners can learn and live in a familiar environment during their first three school years, and
- 5) To enable Jul'hoan children to join government schools in Grade 4 as confident and critically-thinking learners (from Brörmann 1993, 1994).

The first four objectives focus on the language and culture of the communities, and the importance of community involvement in the project. The fifth switches the focus to the government school, and emphasizes the importance of the Village Schools students transitioning into the government schools. The dual goals of building upon local culture and simultaneously promoting greater access to the mainstream education system provided an

⁵ He later served as Namibia's Prime Minister, 2005–2012.

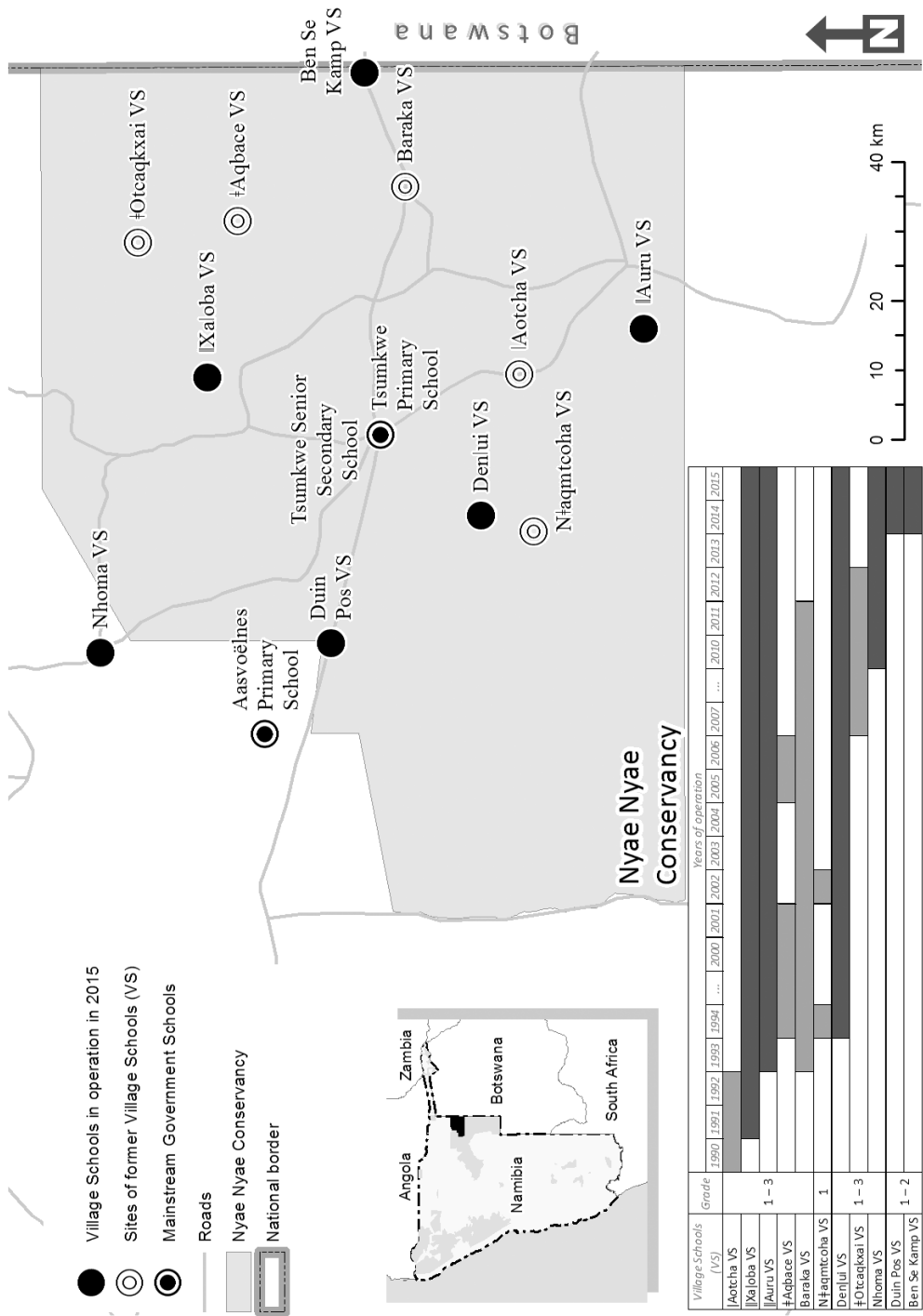


Fig. 22: Map of Village Schools (credit Stefan Chapkanski)

attractive package, and the Nyae Nyae VSP quickly became recognized nationally, regionally, and internationally as a cutting-edge education project for an indigenous minority. The NNFC and the NNDNFN, whose holistic approach to community development made them attractive to donors, both received substantial funding throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The vision of these organizations greatly facilitated the creation of the VSP and meant that the education project was situated within a broader vision that incorporated aspects of the Nyae Nyae development program into the training of teachers. The teachers themselves worked to incorporate both traditional knowledge and current community issues into the curriculum. This emphasis on the value of their traditional knowledge and culture was new for the student teachers, and incorporating these elements into the curriculum did not come naturally to them – but with encouragement they found ways to do so (Brörmann, personal communication May 2015).

As a result of the linguistic work of Dickens and several talented young Ju'hoan men, by Namibian Independence in 1990 the Ju'hoansi orthography was ready to develop for use as a language of instruction (Dickens 1992, 1994, 2005). This preparation, combined with the new government's commitment to mother-tongue education during the first three years of school, resulted in the acceptance of the Ju'hoansi language under the Namibian Basic Educational Reform Program (BERP) as the medium for a pilot project in curriculum development for five years (1991–1996).

In addition to the researchers and educationalists mentioned above, many forward-thinking individuals working with the government found ways to promote flexible alternative approaches, while still remaining within national policy – something that required careful navigating in the post-apartheid political terrain. Although the Ministry accepted the educational logic of mother-tongue education, and was enthusiastic about including a San language in the BERP, they were wary of a project that might appear to be providing “special” or “separate” education. In newly independent Namibia, it was important that neither the goal nor the result be perceived as isolating a particular ethnic group.

The community and supporting NGOs started the project, but it was decided early on that the ministry should ultimately take over. This concern is evident in Kann's emphatic statement in her initial consultancy report for the VSP quoted at the beginning of the chapter as the first point under the section heading “Link with the Ministry of Education and Culture” (1991). Another reason for the project to be absorbed within the ministry, though not explicitly discussed by Kann, was sustainability – this became clearer as the project went on. The education of citizens is considered to be a responsibility of the national government, and donors are usually unwilling to fund such projects indefinitely. Furthermore, being part of the ministry system of teacher training and employment structure was viewed

as an important way to improve the options available to Ju'hoansi youth who wished to become teachers. The incorporation of the project into the Ministry was also seen as necessary to ensure that the Ju'hoansi – and other San – had the same access to government school, teacher training, and ultimately employment as the rest of Namibia's citizens. The logic and practical considerations of this are laid out very clearly by Roger Avenstrup, a Danish consultant for the Namibian government recruited by Namibia Association of Norway (NAMAS)⁶ at the time that the Village Schools project was being developed:

[T]he reason for wanting accreditation was to be able to give the Ju'hoansi teachers the opportunity for pay and conditions equal to any other teacher. It would also mean that they could be employed by the Ministry, and not be project-dependent and thus have security of employment. The career path for a teacher was linked to qualification, and since under-qualification was one of the mechanisms of apartheid to deprive non-white Namibians of education or any chance of promotion equal to the whites, a major thrust in the reform was to ensure that all under-qualified teachers were brought up to a minimum level of qualification, which was the equivalent of the new three-year fulltime Basic Education Teacher Diploma. [Personal communication 5 August 2008]

Avenstrup worked with other individuals within the government, in particular Patti Swarts, a Namibian educational researcher and then Director of NIED, to facilitate the development of standards that would both accommodate the Ju'hoansi's particular experiences, and allow them to enter into mainstream teacher training (Swarts and Avenstrup 1995; Avenstrup and Swarts 1999). The Basic Education Teaching Diploma (BETD) developed by the new Namibian Ministry of Education was based on primary teacher training projects that had been developed in the exile community in Angola. It was "designed to train teachers in learner-centered (social constructivist) education and to become reflective practitioners as professionals ... with emphasis of self-produced materials. Amongst other things, mother tongue teaching, and local culture and traditions, the local environment and local relevance were strongly emphasized and encouraged" (Avenstrup, personal communication 2008; see also Zeichner and Dahlstrom 1999). As such, it was thus very suited to accommodating the alternative teacher-training program designed for the Nyae Nyae Village Schools.

The entry-level requirements for the BETD included the possibility of an equivalent to the formal qualifications – which were a Junior Secondary Certificate (JSC, or Grade 10) examination, or another recognized qualification at that level – and at least five years ac-

⁶ Avenstrup was recruited by the NAMAS at the request of the first Minister of Education and Culture, Nahas Angula, in 1990. He worked with the International Institute for Educational Development (is there an abbreviation for this institute?) in Windhoek until 1997. He was the acting head of the Task Force for Teacher Education Reform, involved with the creation of the Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) (Østbye 2000).

ceptable teaching experience. In the first decade after Independence, the need for Namibian teachers far exceeded the number who could meet these qualifications. In an effort to boost the numbers who could work in the new country's schools, the Ministry of Education introduced the Basic Instructional Skills Certificate, a one-year part-time course in lesson planning, teaching methods and assessment techniques and some background theory. However, the Jul'hoan teachers who were beginning training with the Village Schools Project did not have a level of formal academic and professional development to meet any of these requirements. In a formal communication, NIED, who was working on the inclusion of the Jul'hoan language into the curriculum, advised the Permanent Secretary that it was

theoretically possible to reach comparable knowledge, skills and attitudes partly or wholly through other means. In such cases, the knowledge, skills and attitudes would not be able to be validly assessed through the JSC examination. A valid means of assessment for the alternative acquisition of equivalent knowledge, skills and attitude would have to take into account the results of both formal and non-formal learning and experiential learning. [NIED 1997, in Avenstrup and Swarts 1999:9]



Fig. 23: Three of the first teachers in the first Village School in |Aotca: |I!ae Benjamin, Kxao Moses and Gɛkɛao Martin, working with children (1990, courtesy of Melissa Heckler)

The Task Force for Teacher Education Reform worked out how the competencies of the village schools teachers acquired through their cultural and educational background and teaching experience could be evaluated in relation to the JSC, or Grade 10 examination. NIED recommended major assignments that would give evidence of a knowledge-based equivalent to Grade 10. These included assignments in history and geography that provided an overview of Namibia and in-depth studies on the San or the Nyae Nyae area (for example of leadership systems, relations between groups, and the development of local resource maps), science assignments based on the ecology of the Nyae Nyae area, math work related to everyday life and the immediate environment of the teachers, and language work that included written transcriptions of Ju!hoan oral history, as well as work in English. The teacher trainer was specifically requested to supplement resource books and reading lists with the knowledge of the older people in the community (Avenstrup and Swarts 1999:9–10).

One of the early teacher trainees, Kxao Martin, described his process to us during the evaluation for NAMAS in 2010. Having gone to school through Grade 8 during the apartheid years, he went through the training process of the VS. “We started in Baraka, attended pre-service training where we would go to the village and do the practical teaching. Then we would go back and share experiences after two weeks.” The VS Coordinator would come to observe teaching practice in the classrooms. Eventually, he said, they came to the issue of pre-service training; “obviously...we had to obtain certain qualifications” even though by that time, “we were actually teaching, going into the classroom and teaching after all these years of training” (Interview, July 2010). He went on to say the following:

[W]e were not even close to Grade 10 ... but there was an agreement with the Ministry in order to bring us to the required level, so we could at least reach Grade 10, and get into the ISC⁷ program. And through that process, we could make it into the college of education. [ibid.]

This required a substantial time commitment on the part of the teacher–trainees, as Martin pointed out: “I was teaching, training, and studying at the same time.” He received his ISC in 1999, and started the BETD program in 2000. After all of this personal investment, however, he dropped out of the program in 2001 because of “domestic and financial problems.” He was not the only one. Although the reasons for this varied, by the time I was there in 2001, several of the initial teachers had dropped out, and new “junior teachers” had begun to be trained in their place. By 2010, none of the original teachers was still working – in fact, most of the teachers were not Ju!hoansi at all – we will look more closely at this issue in Chapter 7.

⁷ The Basic Instructional Skills Certificate became known simply as the ISC.



Fig. 24: Learners at /Aqpace Village School in 1998, with an English book

The creation of the Intersectoral Task Force for Educationally Marginalized Children (IT-FEMC) in 1996 and the official identification of San learners as one of the three most marginalized groups in the country (MBESC 2000) indicated that the Namibian government was prepared to take on the responsibility of providing relevant education to San learners. While the transition from a private project to government school was considered an inevitable one for the VSP, it was recognized from the beginning that the process would not be easy. Consultancy reports, government studies, and internal documents all emphasized that in the transition process there was a need for continuity, the cultivation of Ju'hoan teachers, formal and informal links with Tsumkwe school, and careful consultation with the communities (Kann 1991; Swarts and Avenstrup 1995; Brörmann and Pfaffe, 1995a, 1995b). As described above, the government ministry was extremely accommodating in this process.

Nonetheless, despite the emphasis on flexibility in all of the consultancy reports and evaluations of the VSP, the plan for the ultimate take-over by the ministry meant in practice an additional set of external requirements to which the VS and teachers must conform. Biesele describes the knowledge that the project would have to transition to a government school as something that was “hanging over our heads, like an axe.” She worried that the project needed a longer time to grow and develop before being subjected to the more rigid requirements of the government system. One result of the impending transition, for exam-

ple, was that “an element of mainstreaming was incorporated into the project at every level. In many ways this worked against the development of community involvement and other key components of the original project” (Interview with Bieseke, 16 July 2010).

Brörmann also emphasizes that mainstreaming was contrary to the goals of the VSP, and she worked to balance the various requirements from her position as Education Coordinator in Windhoek (personal communication, 4 July 2015). Recommendations by Mendelsohn et al. stipulated early on that the field worker in Nyae Nyae (i.e. the VS Coordinator) and the Education Coordinator in Windhoek should continue in their posts “at least into the transitional period. The coordinator will be an essential link while all the details are worked out as to how and in what ways MEC should take responsibility for the project” (1995:17). Nonetheless, when Brörmann resigned in 1995, this position was not filled, and contact between the project on the ground, and the ministry in Windhoek remained inconsistent, and efforts uncoordinated. This tension between the need to participate in mainstream systems and the need for community ownership is one that bedevils indigenous education projects around the world, as described in Chapter 3.

Early 2000s – preparing for transition to Ministry of Education

My long-term research at Nyae Nyae began in 2001, at the start of the project’s second decade. The impending take-over by the ministry had not yet happened – but the (then) MBESC⁸ was involved with the project in numerous ways. They paid the salaries of the senior teachers, and the teachers were considered by the ministry to be under their jurisdiction, and answerable to them. The ministry had supplied some equipment and books. NIED, as the professional branch of the education ministry, was supporting the development of the mother-tongue literacy materials in Jul’hoansi. The principal of the government school at Aasvoëlne was also the principal of the Village Schools and the government paid his salary.

The main responsibility for keeping the Village Schools running at this time fell on the Village Schools Coordinator (also known as the VISCO), an expatriate whose salary was paid by the NNDFN. Previously, there had been coordinators placed both in Nyae Nyae and in Windhoek, as described above, but, by the time I was doing my fieldwork, the two jobs had been effectively collapsed into one. Although a large part of the teacher training was seen as the responsibility of the Ministry, the job responsibilities of the VISCO included teacher training and support, materials development, monitoring, and some aspects of project administration and coordination. Between the inception of the project and the Ministry

⁸ Since 2007, this ministry is simply the “Ministry of Education.”

take-over in 2004, there were four different people employed in the Coordinator's position (and three in teacher training) and each had his or her own approach to materials development, training support, and the empowerment of children, teachers, and other community members.⁹ The dynamics at this pivotal time were the focus of my research, and insights gained then are discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

The actual hand-over of the project from the NNDFN to the government occurred in 2003, a year that was marked by a number of transitions that impacted San education. This same year, the Norwegian organization NAMAS held a consultative conference to determine how they could best support San education in Namibia.

The Namibia Association of Norway (NAMAS)

NAMAS has been active in Namibia since it was established in June 1980, with a particular focus on education. Throughout the 1980s, NAMAS took an anti-apartheid stance, aligning with SWAPO and supporting teacher training for Namibians in exile, so that they would be prepared to start teaching in the new independent Namibia they were fighting for. This training encouraged a focus on the importance of mother-tongue education as well as English, and learner-centered teaching methods. Following Independence, NAMAS worked closely with the new education ministry on the development of education policy and practice (Østbye 2000). In the 1990s, NAMAS initiated the Ondao Mobile Schools Project, an education project for the Himba, small-scale and highly mobile pastoralists in the Kunene region. This project was seen as successful and in 2002, NAMAS commissioned a desk study to look into the situation of education for the San. Bernt Lund, who had been the first Norwegian ambassador to Namibia (1990–1992), conducted this study. In the resulting report, *Mainstreaming Through Affirmative Action*, Lund (2002) provides a summary of the situation for San in Namibia, paying special attention to primary level education, strengthening teacher qualifications and skills, and the establishment of a resource center for teachers. The main objective described in this report is the latter, the development of a Teachers Resource Centre (TRC) in Tsumkwe, which would provide support to San principals, teachers and student teachers, facilitate mother-tongue materials development, build capacity in the community for education and literacy promotion, and address legal issues.

In 2003, NAMAS held a consultative conference, which resulted in a proposal to develop TRCs in Mangetti Dune and Tsumkwe, and to establish a steering committee for San educa-

⁹ Although the coordinator who was there while I was conducting research extended her contract twice and remained in the post for almost 5 years, teachers often noted differences between her approach and that of previous coordinators.

tion. Partners identified included WIMSA, LAC, NIED, the (then) MBESC, and the ITFEMC (now defunct). Although NNDFN had supported the Village Schools for its first ten years, after handing over the responsibility for the Schools to the government they did not feel that they had the capacity or mandate to be involved with education. They were aware of and condoned the activities, but their involvement with NAMAS' efforts was minimal and there was little communication.

Also in 2003, in compliance with the Namibian government's policy of decentralization, the Ministry established regional directorships of education in the country's 13 regions. Tsumkwe constituency is in the Otjozondjupa region, whose headquarters are in Otjiwarongo (500 km from Tsumkwe; see fig. 22, p. 98). The Ministry itself was in the midst of a major upheaval as new positions were created, responsibilities were transferred and redefined, and a physical reshuffling of offices took place. In this process there was very little transfer of information about the Village Schools to the new regional office who would now be responsible for administering them (see also Chapter 8).

Thus, NAMAS' involvement with education in Tsumkwe began during a period of intense transition during which much continuity was lost. In interviews conducted in 2010, NAMAS employees (including the teacher advisor and national coordinator, and the previous project coordinator, all of whom were hired after this process) expressed a lack of information about the beginning of the project. This lack of historical understanding meant that there were misperceptions about the origin of the Village Schools. The Deputy Director of the Otjozondjupa regional education office reportedly told one NAMAS employee that the village schools were started without any knowledge of the Ministry of Education (Fieldnotes July 2010). In fact, the Ministry was very involved with the process, as described above. The gap in knowledge transmission about the project was a result of the transition to the ministry in 2003, which coincided with the decentralization process, the opening of the Regional Office in Otjiwarongo, and the installation of a new person in a newly created position of Regional Director. Although the documents had been handed over by NNDFN in the transition process, they apparently did not make it to the new Regional Office. No one at NNDFN or at the Ministry that I have spoken with in the last decade knew what happened to these records. In an interview in 2010, we asked the Regional Director of Education in the Otjozondjupa region what knowledge she had of the NNDFN Village Schools Project that had begun in 1991. She replied that when she entered into that office when the Otjozondjupa Regional Directorate opened in 2003, she received no information about the VSP:

I don't know what program they offered ... when we went to Tsumkwe, it was like starting from scratch. We did not find them there ... If they did any kind of transition, it was at the head office ... we did not hear anything. [Hays et al. 2010:17]

These transitions meant big shifts in approach towards the Village Schools, often without full understanding of what this meant for community members, including the teachers. Although today there is support for the Village Schools at the Regional Directorate, these misperceptions still affect attitudes and, possibly, decision-making processes. In 2010, we found that most involved government officials, and development workers who became involved with Nyae Nyae after 2004, believed either that NAMAS started the Village Schools, or that the project had not been conceived, managed, or developed properly before NAMAS and the Ministry took over. If the Village Schools are perceived as an “illegitimate” project that was begun without the involvement of the Ministry (despite the fact that the project was, from the beginning, striving to comply with Ministry requirements), there may be less willingness to support teachers who need special support, for example, and more emphasis on strict conforming to Ministry requirements. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that the Nyae Nyae community is very well aware of the origins and process of the Village Schools – they are the only stakeholders who have been around to experience all the transitions.

NAMAS approach in Nyae Nyae

The first NAMAS coordinator arrived towards the end of 2003 and was based in Tsumkwe; she stayed for five years. It was not clear at first what the involvement should be with the VSP, and part of the initial coordinator’s brief was to determine where the Ministry needed support in fulfilling their responsibility in Tsumkwe district. The most concrete focus was the establishment of the Community Learning and Development Center (CLDC). However, their support of the Village Schools also quickly became a visible and ongoing area of activity for NAMAS. In early 2008, a teacher advisor was hired to provide increased support to the teachers and in the middle of 2008, a new project coordinator took over. In 2010, NAMAS was moving towards withdrawal of support for the project as initially outlined in project plans, in order that the government could fully take over, and commissioned an evaluation of the project.

The two main elements of NAMAS’ activity in the Tsumkwe district were at that time a focus on *education* and a focus on *rights*. The first proposal was primarily focused on schools, and on plans to establish a mobile Teachers Resource Center (TRC) and the CLDC. The former was intended to support the teachers, and the latter to provide multi-dimensional support to the community for various learning needs. These remain a visible and important contribution from NAMAS. Over time, most of the focus of NAMAS’ activities in

Tsumkwe came to be upon supporting the Ministry in their efforts to increase the numbers of San learners in the schools of the area, especially in Tsumkwe schools.¹⁰

Based on interviews and observation, Hays et al. found that NAMAS' support for the Village Schools was perceived as critical to the continuation of the schools, and that the CLDC and associated TRC had improved effective teaching and access to information and communication facilities and increased reading culture and computer literacy rates amongst learners and community members (2010). The centers provided access to computers for community members, which along with services such as printing and photocopying, were important not only for the teachers but for anyone in Tsumkwe filling out an application or doing distance education. Visitors, including researchers and others, also make use of these centers, especially the CLDC. The Ju!'hoan Transcription Group (JTG), an important project supported by KPF (described in more detail in Chapter 6), has benefited enormously from having a room in the CLDC in Tsumkwe in which to conduct training workshops and other work.

Improving the provision of education included increased participation in the mainstream schools in Tsumkwe, and increased success of teachers in the mainstream teacher training programs. NAMAS' objectives towards this end included: higher enrollment in pre-primary education; an increased number of qualified Ju!'hoansi- and !Xun-speaking¹¹ teachers; a higher percentage of village school learners who continue their education after Grade 3; and an increased number of San learners who complete Grades 10 and 12. (NAMAS 2009). The 2010 evaluation found that efforts in this direction had had very limited success.

In their documents, NAMAS refers to both specific language groups, *Ju!'hoansi* and *!Xun*, and uses the overarching term *San*. If the category San is used interchangeably with specific language groups, interpretations of the goal can vary. Furthermore, increasing the number of teachers who can *speak* Ju!'hoansi and !Xun (as expressed in the documents) is not necessarily the same thing as increasing the number of teachers for whom these languages are mother tongues, nor is it the same thing as ensuring that the mother tongue is taught in the Village Schools. If "increasing the number of qualified Ju!'hoan teachers" is interpreted as simply increasing the number of teachers who are *San*, and/or who can speak Ju!'hoansi, the result is an increase of the number of teachers in the training program, though not necessarily Ju!'hoan teachers.

¹⁰ NAMAS supported LAC in their human rights activities within the Tsumkwe constituency, though this support was terminated in 2009.

¹¹ In the NAMAS documents the spelling !Kung is used, but to avoid confusion I have changed it to !Xun, which is the accepted spelling of the group they are referring to (the !Xun living in Tsumkwe West)

When the government took over responsibility for teacher training in 2004, many of the new teacher trainees were members of other San groups from the region; Ju'hoan teachers themselves continue to do poorly in the formal systems. In 2010, the number of teachers who are actually from the Nyae Nyae area and teaching in any of the government Village Schools had decreased since the initial stages of the VSP, when the twelve teachers in the training program were all Ju'hoansi (Hays et al. 2010; see also Chapter 7).

The goal of increasing the number of Village Schools students (all of whom are Ju'hoansi) in Tsumkwe Schools also met with very limited success. Since 2004, there has been a small progression of students from the Village Schools who have made it through Grade 6. In 2010, there were four students enrolled in Grade 7, and one in Grade 8 – none of whom were attending during our research period. The dropout rate continues to be high, and attendance inconsistent. Interviews with VS students at the school indicate that learners who are older, and who have a relative that is working in Tsumkwe are more likely to stay in school.

In 2010, according to the Secondary School Admission Register Statistics from TJSS, the number of San learners at the secondary school had gone up somewhat between 1999 and 2008 (*ibid.*). However, it was not specified whether the students attending higher grades at TJSS were Ju'hoansi, !Xun, or from another San group. According to all sources, there were no students from the Village Schools above Grade 8 in 2010; and by the time of the NAMAS conference in Tsumkwe in 2014, this had not changed.

Search for the root causes of 'failure'

Despite the support for the Village Schools and for the teachers, the numbers of VS learners continuing at TPS have remained low. From the measure of increasing participation in the mainstream schools, none of the interventions tried so far have been successful. Both the general failure of Ju'hoan children to go beyond Grade 7 in the Tsumkwe school, and of the Ju'hoan teachers to make it through the government teacher training system can be attributed to underlying root problems that must be addressed before educational attainment can be improved. But what are these root problems? How should they be addressed? The goal expressed by NAMAS to “improve access to quality education” for San communities is agreed upon – but what do we mean by “quality education”?

The most comprehensive effort to answer this question was the year-long survey conducted by Le Roux in 1998–1999, described in previous chapters. This survey was based on the feedback of San communities across the region, including Tsumkwe (1999). The long-term research I conducted in the Nyae Nyae conservancy in 2001–2002 support-

ed the recommendations of Le Roux's report (Hays 2007). Our findings are supported by researchers and practicing educationalists, in southern Africa and internationally, who argue that indigenous groups such as the San require, and have a right to, forms of education that match their language and their culture, which allow them to maintain community integrity, and provide access to skills that they determine to be relevant. Although the Village Schools strive for this, the breakdown comes with transition to the government school in Grade 4.

In southern Africa, approaches that appear either to privilege, or to isolate or otherwise disadvantage a particular group are usually dismissed with reference to apartheid. Despite recognition of the importance of grounding in the home language, culture, and identity (see Mendelsohn et al. 1995), equal access to education takes precedence. In this political and social environment, the default approach becomes to channel all efforts towards increasing numbers in the education system – usually without addressing the root problems. The depth of the transition that the San communities are experiencing is overlooked in this approach – three years at the Village Schools are not enough to prepare learners for the mainstream schools, nor have there been any consistent bridging programs allowing the teachers to be adequately prepared for formal teacher education. Attempts to achieve the goals of getting more San children into Tsumkwe School, or developing more San teachers, underestimate the amount of time and support needed. These efforts also largely neglect the traditional culture of San communities and the skills that the children and the teachers bring with them to their educational processes.

Such approaches severely underestimate the structural barriers confronted by San communities in the formal education systems. San children and parents indicate that they would like access to mainstream systems, and the skills and opportunities associated with it. Yet in these systems, the San, like indigenous peoples around the world, do not achieve anything close to the results of other groups. Instead, these systems become part of a concerted assimilation process that often undermine the Ju!'hoansi's own socialization processes and attack the core of their identity, thus contributing to some of the problems the communities face.

In his 2002 desk study, Lund gave a list of reasons for San students' non-attendance at Tsumkwe School. Despite efforts to address these issues, he notes, they persisted, and he emphasized that something more than government intervention was in order. He argued that "a holistic approach is needed ... Creating a flexible school system that goes hand in hand with the motivation of the parents will be two important points of departure" (2002:5). Lund's recommendations match those of Le Roux (1999) and of the NAMAS evaluation conducted in 2010 (Hays, et al. 2010) and many others – a holistic, flexible approach is needed. It can be difficult to maintain the necessary focus on addressing the specific situa-

tion of indigenous communities. There are times when tension arises between the need for what are perceived as “special” approaches, and the emphasis on not compromising quality. The NAMAS evaluation emphasized, however, that “there is no inherent tension” in these approaches – education can be both of high quality, and tailored to a group’s specific needs, culture and language (ibid).

Dynamics among role-players

This chapter provides some of the background and context of the Village Schools, and tries to give a sense of the variety of actors involved in the Nyae Nyae VSP – and the depth of the issues they are trying to confront. While this has had the positive effect of ensuring access to a wide variety of expertise, ideas, and perspectives throughout the course of its development, the various role-players have not always seen eye to eye, and disagreements and misunderstandings among them have created their own challenges. Furthermore, communication among the involved parties was not always consistent or timely. When the VSP headquarters was located in Baraka Village in the 1990s, the only communication was one-way radio. The distance and lack of easy connection between Baraka and Windhoek, where the NNDFN and the ministry were based, exacerbated communication problems and added to confusion about various aspects of the schools.

Differences in the philosophies, methods, and personalities of the individuals filling various roles also led to a lack of consistency and continuity in the implementation of some of the goals and objectives of the VSP. At some points over the years, confusion among the teachers about who they were supposed to answer to was exacerbated by a failure of the responsible organizers to coordinate planned activities for the teachers. This resulted in situations where workshops for teachers conflicted, or where teachers were expected to spend an entire vacation period engaged in teaching or language workshops organized by various parties (See also Chapter 7). When the project transitioned to the Ministry, this confusion intensified (Hays et al. 2010). This situation has also affected the goal of community consultation and participation, central and critical to the success of the project. This will be discussed further in Chapter 10.

Objects of research

The intentions were there, curricula were there, sub-systems were set up, rules were bent – to try and include the village school teachers in the mainstream rather than leave them in a project enclave, and to empower them ... so the village schools could

become a self-sustaining cluster in the Tsumkwe area and raise the overall level of education there. It will be very important to learn why it didn't work, and to find out what will work, or they will remain uneducated or half-educated objects of research. [Avenstrup, personal communication, 27 July 2008]

These comments by Avenstrup, reflect questions that have been posed by many involved with the village schools over the years, including the Ju'hoansi themselves. There are a few points in the above quote that I would like to draw out, all of which are central to the issues I describe in this book. The first is the genuinely good intentions, and actions, of so many partners involved in the early planning for the Village Schools, including the government and those working with them. As described in this chapter, the project attracted a number of progressive and committed individuals coming from different perspectives, with different areas of expertise and the ability to make things happen in the necessary areas – government policy and practice, securing funding, developing the language and materials, training student teachers, developing community based curricula, lobbying for recognition of San traditional knowledge, and ensuring community participation.

The second point is the question that follows from this understanding – why did it “not work”? This question, which has been asked by many over the years, exemplifies the paradox surrounding the project, and indigenous education in general. Why, despite all the investment that seems to have been made, do indigenous children have such high attrition rates in the mainstream systems? Why do the Ju'hoansi drop out from the government school? A related point is the importance of finding out what *will* work. I would like to add the following questions: what actually *has* worked? What were the main objectives of the Nyae Nyae community and what have they gotten out of it? What are their frustrations with the Village Schools and with education in general? There is not one simple answer to any of these questions, but some possibilities and considerations are illuminated in the chapters that follow.

In the quote above Avenstrup expresses concern that, unless solutions are found to bring them up to the same educational level as their fellow Namibian citizens, the Ju'hoansi will “remain uneducated or half-educated objects of research.” This reflects a very common concern on the part of the Namibian government, and others throughout southern Africa. Arguments supporting ‘respect’ for traditional knowledge and ways of life are often blurred with a perceived desire to keep the culture intact ‘in order to study them.’ If it were only researchers or other outsiders arguing for the desire to maintain traditional ways of life, this would be a valid concern. However, this is not the case. Across southern Africa, San individuals and communities, including the Ju'hoansi, express a very strong desire to maintain their culture, their traditions, and their knowledge. They *also* express a strong desire to gain the

competencies that can be acquired in the mainstream education system. Not surprisingly, these desires are clearly stated to researchers who visit their communities to find out what is and is not working for them, and are included in reports of their findings (Le Roux 1999; Suzman 2001; Hays et al. 2010; Lee 2013; Dieckmann et al. 2014).

Indigenous peoples around the world express a clear desire to maintain their culture, knowledge, language, and value systems, alongside a desire to have access to mainstream schools, skills, knowledge, and language. Such interests are not only expressed in the academic literature – they are also clearly outlined in international indigenous rights declarations and other formal statements. In all of these, the emphasis is on the balance of access to dominant institutions and recognition of the importance and value of local culture, language, and knowledge.

Indigenous education as a local and a global issue

In 2008, after attending the 8th WIPCE in Melbourne, Australia, I traveled with Cwisa Cwi (the Village School Principal) and Laurentius Davids (a native speaker of Khoekhoegowab, and the Education Officer for Khoe and San Languages at NIED), two of the Namibian participants, to Alice Springs for four days, to learn more about indigenous education in the remote parts of Australia. We met with aboriginal and non-aboriginal activists, linguists, teachers, literacy workers, and educationalists from Alice Springs and surrounding communities, and drove through the bush to Willowra, a small aboriginal community about 300 km north west of Alice Springs. Although we knew we would find similarities between the situation of Australian Aborigines and the San of southern Africa, all three of us were very impressed by striking parallels between situations of these two groups, in particular as they relate to educational approaches and challenges. Cwi in particular was struck by how similar the situation was to his own community in Namibia. He commented throughout the visit on the parallels – the discussions about the importance of their culture, the problems with training aboriginal teachers, issues of substance abuse – and people sitting on their porches painting and making crafts. Cwi, who had been missing his community while he visited the cities of Melbourne and Alice Springs, said – “it feels like I’m at home.” In addition to the social likenesses, as we drove through the red desert spotted with acacia trees and presided over by a deep blue cloudless sky, we all remarked that we could be driving through the Nyae Nyae Conservancy.

Osborne and Guenther describe their recent findings that, although remote Aboriginal communities do have a strong desire to gain skills, knowledge, and understanding from Western Education, they also have a strong desire for these to be approached from within

their own cultural knowledge traditions, which they wish to maintain. These authors describe the “blue sky” thinking of the Australian national education system, which “dreams of an apparent utopia where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are ‘equal’ with their non-Indigenous counterparts – and yet fails to deliver, despite the funds being poured in to ‘fix the problem’” (2013:116). They contrast this with a more grounded approach, what they call “red dirt” thinking. A “red dirt” approach, they suggest, would see “learning and educational success defined in the local rather than the national” and would develop strategies based on local aspirations. It is clear, they argue, that “remote Aboriginal communities have not relinquished their epistemological priorities and bought into the binary narrative of prioritising western knowledge and values ... or resigning to ‘failure and hopelessness’” (120). Like Australian aborigines, and many other current and former hunters and gatherers – the Ju!’hoansi have maintained their value systems and their epistemological priorities, despite enormous pressure to change. These characteristics make it an ideal site for a project such as the Village Schools.

At the time of writing, the Village Schools have been in existence for about 25 years – a period which could be considered very long (by the standards of development projects and donors, for example) or very short (relative to the length of time that the Ju!’hoansi have occupied the region). As I have already indicated, the Village Schools have, overall, not achieved the hoped-for objectives, as they were defined in original documents – nor as they were later defined by NAMAS; nor as the community themselves have expressed their educational needs and desires. Why not? And, equally importantly, what *have* they achieved? The next five chapters explore the Village Schools from various angles, using the original five objectives as an organizing framework. Objective 3, focusing on the participation of the community, is placed last in the sequence in order to underscore the centrality of the role of the Nyae Nyae Ju!’hoansi themselves, and the ways in which they are clearly communicating their needs and making strategic educational choices.

6 The Ju'hoansi language as a medium of instruction

The principal says that the kids are dumb, because they do not speak English. But this is the San people's place. They should be able to speak their own language! [Ju'hoansi Hostel Matron, Tsumkwe; Fieldnotes, November 2011]

Anyone who has to struggle with the force of a new language when they enter into a new learning atmosphere would understand the confusion that is experienced ... you want to understand what is going on, but you cannot because your mind is blank. You have no words in the new language to offer expression. Soon nothing the child knows or wants to know or say matters.

[Xhwaa Qubi, quoted in Hays 2006:6]

Although an enabling language policy is in place, practical implementation has many challenges – especially for the most marginalized group in Namibia, the San.

[Davids 2011:126]

Village Schools Objective 1: To use the Ju'hoansi language as the medium of instruction.

Access to education in their own language is one of the most consistently expressed desires of San parents and children, and it is identified as one of the most important reasons that San children leave school (Le Roux 1999; Hays 2006; Kamwendo et al. 2009; Mbukusa and Nekongo-Nielsen 2014). The use of the mother tongue, Ju'hoansi, as the language of instruction was the first of the cardinal objectives defined early on in the Village Schools project. As already described in Chapter 5, the possibility of mother-tongue education was one of the driving forces behind the initial creation of the Village Schools. The development of Dickens' user-friendly orthography provided both an inspiration and a practical grounding for the project. It was seen by many Ju'hoansi as the most important element of the school, in large part because it would allow the incorporation of the stories of the elders into the curriculum, thus promoting community involvement and ownership of the education Project. The combination of the use of a foreign language at the school (at that time Afrikaans) and a lack of mother tongue education in Ju'hoansi was considered to be a major reason why the children were not able to succeed in school. This was an effect both of not understanding the language of instruction (and the communicational culture, as described in Chapter 3), as well as experiencing the stigma attached to their own language, which was a marker of San ethnicity. Ju'hoansi and other San across the region tell stories of having their language ignored, ridiculed, or punished in government schools. In some areas, par-

ents fear that their children will stop speaking their mother tongue,¹ and mother tongue education is desired to prevent this.

Qubi, a Naro speaker from Botswana quoted above, eloquently expresses the alienation caused by education in an unfamiliar language. Speaking at a conference on Mother Tongue Education held in Gaborone in 2005, she described the disorientation felt by a child experiencing the institution of “school” for the first time, unable to understand anything that is being said to them – and unable to be understood. Although San parents and children across the region express a strong desire for education in their own language, for the vast majority, this is not possible.

In this context, the Nyae Nyae Ju’hoansi are considered extremely fortunate to have the opportunity for mother tongue education, in their villages, for three years. Currently, the only other San groups who have this opportunity are those who have experienced intensive assimilation, and speak as a mother tongue a language used for instruction in schools.² Despite this advantage, Ju’hoansi children are not prepared for the switch to English when they come to the primary school at Tsumkwe in Grade 4. As discussed below, they have not had enough time to learn the language in a classroom setting. Language thus is not only a pedagogical barrier but also a social one; Ju’hoansi parents and students experience severe linguistic discrimination in the government school (see also Chapter 8). The following sections will first briefly position the Ju’hoansi within regional and national language and education dynamics. Although language and education policy in Namibia is progressive, it is also restrictive in some ways, with a strong focus on English to the neglect of African languages in general (Hopson 2011). This is especially problematic for San students, and this context will be provided before turning to a discussion of language issues related to education in Nyae Nyae and the Village Schools.

Statistics

There are no San learners in Grades 11 and 12 at the Tsumkwe Senior Secondary School in the Otjozondjupa Region this year. They all failed Grade 10 over the past

¹ This is in particular a concern in Botswana, where children are separated from their parents and communities and Setswana is strongly enforced at the school and hostel.

² For example, this is the case among the ǀKhomani San of South Africa, who today speak Afrikaans as a mother tongue. This community is engaged in concerted efforts to re-introduce their language, Nǀu, although only a few elders speak it as a mother tongue (see Crawhall 2005). Many San communities in Botswana have switched to Setswana as their mother tongue. In some cases, such as the Hail’om, the language that they assimilated to was another Khoe San language, in their case, Khoekhoegowab – which is a language of instruction in Namibia.

two years as they could not read, write or speak English. [Tsumkwe Senior Secondary School Head of Department, quoted in New Era,³ 7 October 2014]

The absence of any San students in Grades 11 or 12 at the TSSS made national news at the end of 2014, as reported in the English-language newspaper *New Era*. This was considered shocking because the Tsumkwe District (former Bushmanland) is the part of the country that has the highest concentration of San residents, and is most strongly associated with the San in the national imagination. A brief look at the national statistics for San children in school indicates, however, that this is not an isolated case, but a national pattern.

Accurate numerical data on the participation of San children in school are difficult to get. Although breakdowns by ethnicity are included in national statistics (in contrast with Botswana, where the school statistics are not disaggregated by ethnic group), these figures must be considered as rough estimates, and several factors must be kept in mind. Statistics on ethnic groups in schools are usually gathered from forms the students fill out, where they are asked to identify their home language by choosing from a list, in which “San” is one of the choices. San students may not identify themselves as such, leading to a lower count. In some areas, this happens because of the stigma attached to the San identity. Also, many San students do not use this identity marker, and their specific languages, such as Jul’hoansi, are not included as a choice. On the other hand, counts taken near the beginning of the school year do not reflect the high dropout rates and irregular attendance, and will thus be high. Despite these caveats, the available statistics clearly indicate very low participation by San children in the formal education system of Namibia.

Figures from the UNDP from 1998 estimated that less than 20% of Namibian San children were enrolled in school that year. Government figures from the same year calculate to about 25–30% (UNDP 1998, EMIS 1999). These numbers do indicate a dramatic rise in attendance from the early 1990s when the enrolment of San children was estimated to be closer to 10–12% (from Suzman 2000). However, this increase is slight in comparison to the dramatic drop-off in attendance in higher grades. In 1998 there were a total of 3,738 San learners in the country, with 2,723 (72,8% of all San learners enrolled) in lower primary (Grades 1–3); the figure drops to 803 by upper primary, to 193 by junior secondary, and by senior secondary there were only 19 learners identified as San in all of Namibia – only 0.5% of all San learners were in Grades 11 and 12 (Suzman 2001).

Namibian government figures from intervening years show the total enrollment of San learners in Namibia’s schools increasing steadily over the years but the distribution has shown only a slight upwards shift (see Fig. 25, p. 118). Most recently, in 2012, the total en-

³ A national Namibian English Language Newspaper.

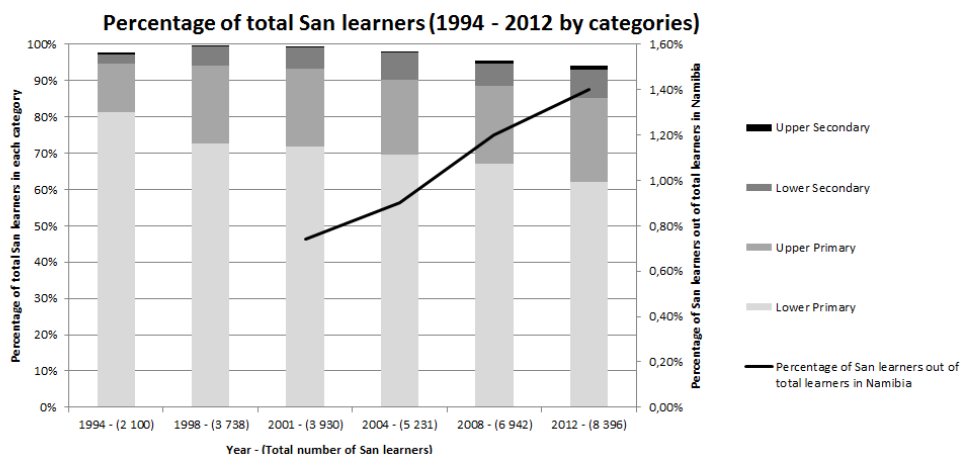


Fig. 25: Graph showing the distribution of San learners by grade level, according to Government statistics

rollment was 8396 (which was an increase of 20% over four years). Of these, 5222 were in lower primary and 1919 in upper primary. There were 769 San students in secondary; of these, only 91 – about 1% of the total number of San students – were in senior secondary. In comparison, the percentage of students nationwide in senior secondary is 6%.⁴ Although the numbers of enrollments are increasing, the “survival rate” (UNICEF 2011) for San students past Grade 7 remains very low compared to the national average.

Other than the estimates for 1998 noted above, there is no official statistic indicating the percentage of San students who are attending school. In the most recent EMIS report, the discussion about Table 16, which depicts the national breakdowns by home language, draws special attention to the numbers of San learners, noting that

the San speaking learners were only 1.4% of the entire learner population. **This could be attributed to the fact that their population is relatively small, or most are not attending schools. The Ministry needs a thorough investigation in this regard.** It should also be noted that there are a lot of San learners who do not speak San languages at all and/or at home, therefore do not consider San Languages as their home language. [EMIS 2013:41; emphasis in original]

The results of the recent national survey (Dieckmann et al. 2014), which collected data from San communities across the country, indicated that about 50% of those interviewed had

⁴ Among speakers of European languages it is 10%; and for Khoekhoegowab speakers it is a bit over 3%. The language with the largest percentage of speakers (24%) is Oshikwanyama, about 6% of whom are in senior secondary. If all students continued through senior secondary, the percentage would be 16%; the only language group which approaches this is German, at about 15%.

never been to school, and 90% of those who had been to school had dropped out before receiving any certificate. A breakdown of figures into two age groups showed that those who began school prior to Independence dropped out at an earlier stage than those who began school after 1990 (Thiem and Hays 2014:525). Nonetheless, among the participants in the study, only a very small minority had gone beyond primary in formal education according to the dominant standards. Thus the existing data indicate that the San do indeed participate at far lower levels than other groups – notwithstanding the possible under-reporting (and thus under-representation) of San in the EMIS figures. A more thorough study would indeed be useful.

Despite Namibia's progressive policies, and concern for educationally marginalized children, existing statistics all point to a very low participation by San children in the mainstream education system, especially from upper primary school onwards. The lack of San students at TSSS in 2014 is not an unusual case. As is reflected in the quote opening this chapter, this high dropout rate is closely connected to language; lack of competence in English is one of the biggest barriers that San children face. Understanding the role of language requires an understanding of the local language relationships and hierarchies.

Language families and linguistic dynamics in southern Africa

The language of the Ju'hoansi, and other speakers of Khoe San languages, is one of their most distinctive, and famous, cultural features. The click sounds described in the introduction are the most instantly recognizable feature; this has often led outsiders to lump the languages together and to ignore the differences among them. In fact, the Khoe San language family is extremely diverse. San language activists have separated the linguistic term "Khoisan" into its components *Khoe* and *San* (Penduka Declaration, WIMSA 2004; see the section below in this chapter); I follow this convention.

The vast majority of southern African citizens speak languages belonging to one of three major language families, each encompassing a number of subfamilies and languages: the Indo-European, Bantu, and Khoe San language families. The general socio-economic status of members of these families is reflected in their access to education in their home languages. Speakers of European (or European-based) languages in Namibia include English, Afrikaans⁵ (a language derived from Dutch) and German. Importantly, these are the only language groups who have access to education in their own language for the entire length

⁵ Although based on a European language, today Afrikaans is not only spoken by descendants of Europeans; it is also today the home language of many African groups.

of their schooling. Bantu languages spoken in Namibia include Ochiwambo, Otjiherero,⁶ Kwangali, Setswana, and Thimbukushu, among others. Most speakers of Bantu languages have access to home language education for the first three years of school, with a switch to English in Grade 4, although some, such as Thimbukushu, have had very little language development, and have little or no access to formal education in their home language. Although the San unquestionably fare the worst, it should be noted that the switch to English as the medium of instruction in Grade 4 is problematic for speakers of all of the African languages spoken in Namibia (see for example, Tötemeyer 2010; Hopson 2011).

The Khoe San language family includes three major linguistic subfamilies, but two main social and political categories, the *Khoe* and the *San*. In general, the former are small-scale pastoralists, and the latter are hunters and gatherers. Socially and historically, these distinctions are relevant, and provide important background to an informed understanding of indigenous language and education dynamics in southern Africa. The Khoe-speaking pastoralists experienced severe marginalization in South Africa, where their language and identity were suppressed from the 19th century onwards. By the end of the apartheid era in 1990, virtually all Khoe (and some San) communities in that country had either been fully assimilated into the “colored” ethnic category, or had intentionally gone “undercover,” adopting the language Afrikaans and many cultural patterns associated with colored ethnicity. In Namibia, however, the Nama and Damara identities remained distinct, and the language that they share, called Khoekhoegowab, has been well developed and is used in the formal education system. The Hai||om, a San group from the Etosha area, speak Khoekhoegowab and thus have access to language in their mother tongue for the first three years. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Hai||om have achieved the highest levels of formal education among San in Namibia.

Overall, however, San minorities, including the Hai||om, are unquestionably the *most* educationally and linguistically marginalized in southern Africa. Across the region the stigma attached to the San has been expressed with reference to their languages since the earliest recorded contact with European settlers. In colonial literature, the San were commonly portrayed as marginal members of the human race; among other things, the click sounds that characterize the languages were used as evidence for their animal nature. David Chidester notes that human language was supposedly “totally absent” (1996:24). He provides quotes from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries describing their speech as “a chattering rather than a language” (Milward 1614); “an inarticulate noise...like the clucking

⁶ The language Otjiherero is spoken also by the Ovahimba nomadic pastoralists residing primarily in the Kaokaveld region of Namibia, who are often listed along with the San as among the most educationally marginalized; see also below this chapter.

of hens, or gabbling of turkeys” (Terry 1777); or “rather apishly than articulately sounded.” (Herbert 1627; all quoted in Chidester 1996:24). Today, there are still many misperceptions about their languages – not least that there is one “San language.”

In fact, the Khoe San language family is made up of several languages, often divided into three language sub-families, traditionally labeled as Northern, Central and Southern.⁷ More recently, these families have been re-labeled according to their word for “human being,” and are often called (respectively) *Ju*; *Khoe*; and *!Kui and Taa*. The exact relationships among these languages are debated, but it is generally agreed that Jul’hoansi is a member of the *Northern Khoe San* or *Ju* family, along with !Xun, the language spoken in the Nǀa Jaqna Conservancy (see Traill 2002). ǀX’ao-ǁ’aen⁸ is a dialect spoken in the Omaheke region of Namibia, and very closely related to the language spoken in Nyae Nyae; they are mutually intelligible. Bieseke et al. note that linguists consider these dialects to be part of a *language complex*, which they call *Ju*, and which extends into southern Angola and western Botswana (2012). This language *complex* does not include !Xun, which is more distantly related, but still a member of the *Ju family*. They note that “there are no clear boundaries between the different dialects” and that speakers of ǀX’ao-ǁ’aen define themselves as “Jul’hoan,” which means “true people” (2012:3).

Many Khoe San languages have been lost over the past centuries, following the processes of extermination, conquest, assimilation, and domination both during the expansion of Bantu-speaking pastoralists from the north, and the colonization by Europeans moving out from the South African Cape. Others are highly endangered with only small numbers of speakers left. Some, however, including Jul’hoansi, are still reasonably strong, as will be discussed below.

Before moving on, it is worth highlighting the implications of this complex and very stratified language situation for San individuals and communities when it comes to the current educational options. In the absence of mother tongue education, most San-speaking students begin school in a Bantu language, and then switch from that language to English in Grades 2, 3 or 4 (depending on the current language policy in the country they are in). Bolaane and Saugestad point out that the Khoe San, Bantu, and European languages are considerably different in phonology, morphology, and syntax, and that the difficulty this

⁷ It is worth noting that these languages are not closely related; a common comparison is that they are as distantly related as the language families of Indo-European and Sanskrit.

⁸ This word means “Northern People” in Naro, an unrelated San language spoken to the south. However, ǀX’ao-ǁ’aen is the southernmost dialect of the *Ju* language complex – which itself is within the “Northern Khoe San” language family. The relativity of these directional terms, combined with the various uses of the other language terms, can be confusing.

creates is usually overlooked. Giving a parallel example with more familiar languages, they point out that, in Botswana

a normal learning situation for a San student would be tantamount to a child growing up in a family speaking Chinese, going to school where the teacher speaks Swahili and gives basic instruction in reading and writing in Swahili, while from the third year onwards she starts to learn French and after two more years, French becomes the main medium of teaching for all subjects. [2006:48]

Although the Nyae Nyae Ju'hoansi are fortunate to have mother tongue education for three years, the shift to English at Tsumkwe in Grade 4 is still problematic, as we shall see later in this chapter.

The current situation of Ju'hoansi

There is a population of about 11,000⁹ speakers of Ju'hoansi in Namibia and Botswana; this figure includes up to 4,000 ǀX'ao-ǁ'āen (Bieseles and Hitchcock 2011:5; Bieseles et al. 2010:3). An estimated 2,000–2,750¹⁰ Ju'hoansi are in the Nyae Nyae area. A population of about 5,000 Ju'hoansi reside just across the border from Nyae Nyae, in Botswana, where the language policy allows for the use of only English and Setswana for educational purposes. The Ju'hoansi language is not considered officially to be endangered; it is classified by the Ethnologue website¹¹ as “vigorous” and by the Endangered Languages Project¹² as “vulnerable” which is only one step down from “safe.” These two terms have different implications, and both are relevant. The Ju'hoansi language is strong in many ways, and vigorous is a good adjective to describe the impression one gets of the language when surrounded by people speaking it in the villages. The Ju'hoansi in Nyae Nyae are extremely verbal, and they strongly value their language and transmit it to their children. When I ask them which language it is most important for their children to learn at school, they almost invariably reply that Ju'hoansi and English are of equal importance (Hays 2007). They also reply, almost invariably, that they would like for their children to have education in their mother tongue

⁹ Bieseles et al. note that although other sources give higher numbers, even the conservative figure of 11,000 may be high (2012). For example, the website Ethnologue gives a figure of 33,600, and characterizes the language as “vigorous.” I have chosen to use Bieseles's figure and the classification given by the Endangered Languages project, as I believe that this is more accurate.

¹⁰ The latter is the figure provided by NNDNFN (see Chapter 2); 2000 is a figure that appears in Bieseles et al. (2012) and elsewhere. Dieckmann et al. (2014) estimate 6,000–7,000 Ju'hoansi in Namibia, including the ǀX'ao-ǁ'āen in the Omaheke. None of these figures is exact, but these numbers all more or less correspond with each other.

¹¹ <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/ktz>

¹² <http://www.endangeredlanguages.com/lang/603> ->when have you last accessed these websites? Make sure you cite them in the bibliography, too!

for a much longer period of time. This is partly in order to have a longer time to learn English, and because they value their language (see Chapter 10).

Despite the still strong transmission of Jul'hoansi, it is also vulnerable; Bieseke et.al. note that it “increasingly yields to Afrikaans, English and Setswana in contact contexts” (2012:3). The language could quite easily achieve endangered status if the conditions for language transmission are lost. In a comment provided to the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP) for their study on language and culture, colleagues and I¹³ emphasized the role of education itself, and government policies on language and education, in undermining language:

There are many [indigenous groups] whose language and culture are alive and well, but are in danger of extinction through the policies and practices that are currently being implemented by national governments. These include education policies that ignore language and culture in the education process. Even where policies are supportive to some extent, implementation is patchy with meager financial and academic support. [Hays et al. 2012:1]

Laurentius Davids argues that as we focus on the challenge of getting San children through formal education, we must acknowledge the role of education in ensuring *survival* of the language and culture:

For San communities, this survival must be economic, cultural, and linguistic. The survival of San languages is threatened by the following factors: The low number of speakers; the encroachment of stronger or dominant groups into their traditional living areas, as the languages and cultures of such groups put pressure on the cultural and linguistic survival of the San; and the lack of mother-tongue education or official recognition of their languages. [2011:132]

The last challenge identified by Davids is being addressed for the Jul'hoansi, whose language is recognized by the government as a language of education and used in the Village Schools for Grades 1–3 and in Gqaina in Grade 1 (see below). Nonetheless, an additional challenge not in the above list but noted by Davids and others (see Hopson 2011) is a lack of funding to adequately develop Jul'hoansi and other San languages. The following section will highlight the language policy environment in Namibia, contextualized within the southern African region, and examine how this plays out in the Nyae Nyae community.

¹³ In this comment we were specifically emphasizing the need to look at indigenous peoples in developing countries and regions, in particular southern Africa (Hays), India (McKenzie) and South America (Aikman).

Education and language policies in southern Africa

South Africa's recent legacy of apartheid includes a history of forced separation of people based on language and ethnicity, and the use of mother tongue education as a tool for separation and oppression. Initially following Namibian Independence from South Africa in 1990, the recognition of indigenous languages and an emphasis on mother-tongue education was perceived as a key to the process of nation building in a multi-ethnic society. At the same time, the English language was embraced as people struggled to throw off the legacy of apartheid, which had imposed education both in Afrikaans and in the mother tongue (Hopson 2011). The choice to use English as the national language and primary language of education was primarily a political one, not a practical one, and the transition to English-language education has not been easy throughout the country (see Hopson 2011; Tötemeyer 2010).

Of the southern African countries, Namibia has made the most progress towards ensuring mother-tongue and culturally appropriate education for the first three years of school. Namibian educational policy recognizes the pedagogical soundness of mother-tongue education during the early years of schooling and is also sensitive to the function of language as a medium of cultural transmission (MBESC 2000). The Namibian Language Policy for Schools specifies that the mother tongue should be used as the medium of instruction during the lower primary phase (the first three years of schooling). It is the language community who is technically allowed to decide the medium of instruction for their children. In practice, this is often limited by the lack of teachers, materials, and funding. From Grade 4 onward, the medium of instruction is English, and the mother tongue should be taught as a subject (MEC 1993). Davids notes that although the language policy states that "all national languages are equal regardless of the number of speakers or the level of development of a particular language," in practice this citation only refers to those languages accepted for educational use (MEC 1993, cited in Davids 2011:128).

Currently, ten African languages are developed and used for instruction;¹⁴ Jul'hoansi is the only San¹⁵ language included on this list:

For speakers of other San languages, there is currently no mother-tongue education. For all San languages, including Jul'hoansi, the lack of development of the language

¹⁴ These include: Jul'hoansi, Khoekhoegowab, Oshikwanyama, Oshindonga, Otjiherero, Rumanyo, Rukwangali, Setswana, Silozi, and Thimbukushu (MEC1993:3-5).

¹⁵ Although Khoekhoegowab is spoken by the Hail'om, a San group, the language is not generally considered to be a San language, as it is spoken primarily by the Nama and Damara, who are Khoe.

and the lack of trained and qualified teachers further complicate their provision in schools. [ibid.]

Room for alternative projects

As noted in Chapter 1, the Intersectoral Task Force on Educationally Marginalized Children, under the (then) MBESC, identified San children as one of the three major “educationally marginalized” groups in the country in 2000, along with the nomadic pastoralist Ovahimba (often referred to in English as the Himba), and the children of farm workers (a great many of whom are San). In addition to an overall lack of schooling that recognizes and validates their language, culture, and background, these minorities were identified as experiencing barriers to formal education stemming from poverty, low socio-economic status, stigma surrounding their culture, and “remoteness” – most San and Himba students live very far from government schools.

Such policies create an environment in which innovative education projects may be implemented for minority communities. The Ondao mobile schools project, for example, which was started with support from NAMAS in 1998, serves the Himba population in Kaokaveld. The mobile schools provide flexible schooling that can move along with the community as they move with their cattle. It utilizes a learner-centered approach and places the emphasis on employing teachers that understand and are accepting of Himba culture. These features help to avoid the cultural alienation to which formal education can lead. Because the Himba speak Otjiherero, a language for which materials have been developed, this project is able to provide mother-tongue education for this marginalized minority (Fergus and Sørvald 2004; Markussen 2009)

Gqaina Primary School is a private, government-subsidized school that has been operating in the Omaheke Region of Namibia since 1981. It is considered by some involved with San education to be a model school, especially because of its very low drop-out rate, its culturally sensitive boarding environment, and its “bridging class” for Jul’hoansi students in Grade 1, and the inclusion of Jul’hoansi as a subject in higher grades (Ninkova 2010). Although none of the teachers are San themselves, over the years some teachers have spoken Jul’hoansi fluently, and San women are employed as hostel matrons and in the kitchen. An approach of respect for linguistic and cultural diversity has resulted in higher levels of school attendance for Jul’hoansi and other San minorities. The school does have important limitations: mother-tongue education is only available in Grade 1; the school itself only goes up to Grade 7; and most students drop out from secondary school. Furthermore, community involvement is limited and the educational model still largely reflects the values, knowledge and culture of dominant groups (Dirkx and Thiem 2014). Nonetheless, Gqaina

Primary School provides an example of how far a general atmosphere of tolerance and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity can go in providing a positive learning environment for minority children.

Although Namibian policies create an environment in which innovative mother tongue education projects may be implemented for San communities, in practice there are several barriers to achieving this. Efforts begun in this direction often stall as key individuals change positions in government, or as new priorities arise in a changing political environment. Furthermore, the relatively small number of children who speak any particular San language also makes it difficult to continue to justify the expense and effort needed to create mother-tongue educational materials. Another critical barrier is the lack of curriculum materials. Andreas Schott, former program coordinator of the Upgrading African Languages Project (AfriLa)¹⁶ in Namibia, noted that

the use of African languages in primary education is constrained by insufficient implementation guidelines, inadequate teaching methods, outdated teaching and learning materials and old-fashioned teacher training concepts. [2005, quoted in Hays 2006:22]

Despite these barriers, it should be noted that Namibia's Ministry of Education has been exceptionally positive about the development of educational materials in San languages, and that much time and resources have been invested in this effort. However, governments tend towards standardization in the provision of formal education and the Namibian government is no exception. Standardization has advantages; it is much more efficient and makes it easier to ensure that everyone has access to the same educational opportunities. It does not easily allow for local cultures to be incorporated into the learning materials, however, which generally reflect mainstream cultural values and lifestyles. Often, the creation of mother tongue education materials means the translation of existing materials into new languages.

Hopson argues that, "Namibian language policy has simultaneously provided an environment to address language issues for the San, and yet fallen far short of what is needed" (2011:116). Ultimately, the language policy "provided unequivocal rationale" for English as the official language and for the emphasis on English above other languages – a primacy that Hopson argues is still prevalent today, while "the enthusiasm for indigenous languages has not continued" (117). In this general environment, the San languages are among the

¹⁶ A programme that was funded by the (former) Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ; now Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GIZ). AfriLa worked closely with the Namibian Ministry of Education to develop African language curriculum materials for Grades 1-3.

most vulnerable, and the efforts that do exist to generate materials in the language (including the Ju|'hoan Transcription Group, described below) rely almost entirely on donor support, as described by Davids:

San languages are dependent on donors to obtain funding for the development of literacy materials and dictionaries to meet educational challenges. The Namibian language policy recognizes the importance of language diversity and guarantees access to mother-tongue instruction for at least the first 3 years of schooling, but does not regard languages – and, in particular, African languages – as a priority. There is need for greater political will and stronger and more visible intervention to ensure the implementation of the provisions of this policy. [2011:133]

Hopson calls for more research and support for San language and educational development, in particular with the aim of creating new and innovative models that promote potential teachers for San communities, improve coordination of existing support for mother-tongue education, and improve their options to participate in education by building upon cultural, educational, and language development (2011:122).

San language activism: the Penduka Declarations

Two meetings held at the Penduka Training Center in Windhoek, Namibia have been crucial events for San language development efforts, and represent regional collaboration on the part of San language activists themselves (WIMSA 2001; 2004). The first Penduka conference, held in April 2001, was the first time that representatives of San language groups, both with and without existing standardized orthographies, worked together to make informed decisions about new orthographies. San community delegates from Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa representing the languages of Ju|'hoansi, !Xun, Khwedam, Khoekhoegowab, and Naro¹⁷ met for a workshop that included training in the principles of phonetics and orthography and a review of the decisions that had been made thus far by outsiders about the orthographies of their languages. The conference produced several observations and recommendations. This led to a second conference, Penduka II, held in September 2004, representing all of the language groups from the first conference with the addition of Hai||om.

The Penduka II Declaration on San Languages in Education are consistent with those from Penduka I and even more precise, emphasizing and outlining the responsibilities of

¹⁷ With the addition of Hai||om at the second Penduka, this includes most San languages spoken in Namibia. The same process has not yet addressed the dozen or more distinct languages spoken in central and eastern Botswana, however.

both governments and San communities in achieving more effective educational strategies, including mother-tongue education, for San learners. The preface to the Penduka II Declaration includes the following summary, describing the San language activists' stance on regional issues of language and education:

The [Penduka] conference affirmed the long standing international principle, endorsed by UNESCO and numerous African educational forums, that a child needs to enter school using his / her first language and then through an additive approach, bring in other languages required for wider communication. The conclusion of the three day workshop highlighted that the use of Media of Instruction (MOI) that are unfamiliar to children, coupled with a sometimes hostile school environment, enduring stereotypes about San people, and the notable lack of parental involvement in schooling, combine to create substantial pressure on San children to lose confidence and drop out of school at an early age.

Moreover, the conference recognized that the hunting and gathering heritage of San peoples means that their elders have highly sophisticated environmental knowledge that could be tapped to promote science and other learning at schools (notably anatomy, biology, botany, zoology, medicine, aerodynamics, as well as human sciences, including the sociology of conflict management). The exclusion of San elders and their knowledge from formal schooling further undermines San children, but also demonstrates a substantial waste of intangible heritage and culture that could benefit the entire education system. [WIMSA 2004:2]

The second paragraph is important. Although there are a number of efforts in the southern African region focusing on improving education for San minorities, all of these are aimed at increasing the integration of San children into the mainstream school system. This is, in part, what San communities are requesting, though *not* (as the above quote makes clear) at the expense of their culture and heritage. In this regional context, the VSP is very important as the only long-term effort to address these concerns by providing mother-tongue education, close to home, and integrating traditional knowledge into the curriculum.

In the concluding quote of this book, the current Chief of the Nyae Nyae Ju/'hoansi TA links the close relationship between the Ju/'hoansi and the land with the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. As described in Chapters 3 and 4, this knowledge and the associated skills are sophisticated and complex, and were traditionally taught through effective techniques. Biesele et al. note that despite pressure from surrounding dominant languages, the language of the Nyae Nyae Ju/'hoansi is still strong, in part because the Ju/'hoansi have "avoided dispossession and fragmentation by creating an internationally recognized land conservancy" (2012:3). Land, language, knowledge, and learning are inseparable for the Nyae Nyae Ju/'hoansi – these interconnections were at the heart of the inspiration for the Village Schools.

The first objective: implementation

Early reports by staff and consultants of NNDFN all indicate that there was tremendous community support for and involvement in the mother-tongue education aspect of the project (Brörmann 1991–1993; Bieseke 1992; Brörmann and Pfaffe 1995a). The initial materials were developed in close consultation with the communities, with the involvement of various individuals in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including, in addition to the teachers, an anthropologist, an educationalist, an educational materials developer, a teacher-trainer, and an education coordinator.

These efforts resulted in a set of Ju'hoan readers with English translations, a songbook, and a music booklet, which were desktop published to allow for alteration of the materials when necessary. A teachers' manual was developed as the outcome of several workshops with the teachers. The desire for *adult* literacy in Ju'hoansi fed into the initial project design. Thus, an important vision driving the VSP was to pioneer the creation of a “self-literate” population, working with the Nyae Nyae villages to design a curriculum communally in a newly-written language (Hitchcock and Bieseke 2000:240).

Following the production of these materials, there was a gap in materials development (although some designs and plans were ongoing). In 1998, the Namibia Early Literacy and Language Project (NELLP) at the NIED contracted Molteno to create first language literacy materials in Ju'hoansi. The Molteno approach had a reputation in southern Africa for the effectiveness of its “Breakthrough to Literacy” learning series, which was developed for a number of southern African languages, and NIED adopted this approach to language learning for all of its first and second language learning and literacy programs. The approach was described as learner-centered and self-pacing and employs a “balanced approach to literacy teaching and learning” that combines phonics and whole-language methodologies (Molteno 2005¹⁸). Emphasis is on the relevance to the life experience of the child, learning through activity, exploration, trial and error, and group activity. Furthermore, the method was said to capitalize “on the phonic regularity and spelling systems of indigenous African languages” (Longman 2015), an approach that makes sense for Bantu languages, which have relatively simple phonetic and phonemic systems. It is unclear how appropriate this method was for Ju'hoansi, which is one of the most phonetically complex languages in the world, and which has a morphological system that is very different from Bantu languages – this was identified as a challenge early on by Nigel Crawhall in a report describing the creation of the Ju'hoansi Molteno materials (1998).

¹⁸ This document is no longer available on the Molteno website, nor is any reference to the San language materials they were developing in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

In 1998–9, a “Breakthrough to Literacy in Ju’hoansi” was jointly developed by Village Schools Teachers, NIED, NELLP and advising linguists (Crawhall 1998; Miller-Ockhuizen 1999). During the development of the Ju’hoansi Molteno materials, efforts were made to



Fig. 26: Molteno materials: Teacher Tsamkxao Rolf using the Molteno materials with his class in 2002

incorporate local culture, characteristics, and environment into the materials. For example, of twelve Molteno readers, six were completely rewritten by the teachers in a materials development workshop (Crawhall, 1998). This illustrates the concerted effort on the part of both the education ministry and Molteno to ensure that the literacy materials had meaning for local populations, and highlights the creativity and initiative on the part the teachers. The Molteno materials created by NELLP for Ju’hoansi were developed for Grade 1, and were in use from 2000 onwards. They were used in all the Village School classrooms when I was conducting my field-

work in 2000–2002. Those for Grades 2 to 3 were reportedly in progress at that time but the funding to create them had not been secured.¹⁹

The NIED initiative to provide Ju’hoan students with the same materials as other language groups in Namibia was unique in southern Africa and illustrated the high level of commitment on the part of the Namibian government towards the provision of mother-tongue education to all language groups. The materials were seen as a major step forward for San education in southern Africa and their development was viewed as part of a process, the ultimate goal of which is to provide mother-tongue education to all southern African minorities (Davids 2011; Hays 2009; Hopson and Hays 2009).

¹⁹ A *Breakthrough to Literacy in Khwedam* was being produced by Molteno in 2001, though I was unable to get updated information on the status of this project. I was also unable to get information about any planned continuation of the materials, and it does not seem that this is being considered any longer.

Nonetheless, there were a few areas that were problematic from the start. Crawhall noted in his report that the long term plans on the part of the government were unclear:

It appears that the development of Breakthrough to Jul'hoansi is being done outside a clear government plan for the future of San languages as a whole ... more clarity on this issue would mean that the Jul'hoan experience could be used more effectively as a model to help other communities prepare for similar transitions. [1998:1]

As Crawhall pointed out, the community's motivation for literacy at the local level was also not clear. The transition from an oral culture to a literate one is a complex process, and the creation of mother-tongue materials using a standardized formula – even if there is input from select members of the community – does not allow for maximum community participation and control over the process. One problem that surfaced was literally with the materials themselves. The Molteno method employed small pieces of laminated cardboard, on which words or morphemes in the target language, in this case Jul'hoansi, were printed; the students would then string these together on a specially-designed board to create sentences. Because the pieces are small and easily lost in the sand, there was a requirement on the part of NIED and Molteno that the floors of the schools be paved with cement before the materials would be provided. This delayed the introduction of the materials in some of the schools because people lacked materials or the labor to do the work. This requirement was quite far from the grass-roots ideals expressed in Kann's "Where the Sand is the Book," (1991) and raised questions about the compatibility of small and relatively expensive pieces for use in an environment where the most common ground surface is fine sand.

Other complications arose. There was an understanding by the teachers in 2001 that they had been instructed not to use any other literacy materials while they were introducing the Molteno method, and so many had stopped using the early materials that had been developed in cooperation with the community. Clarification through Molteno and NIED in 2002 emphasized that the Molteno method was not meant to exclude the use of other materials; however, the confusion about what materials to use and how to use them had already become prevalent among teachers. In 2002, reports that some teachers were not using the Molteno materials reached NIED, and the state of the literacy program became an area of contention. One problem was that there was no NELLP regional coordinator appointed during 2001; thus, the teachers had no follow-up or other support for their work with the Jul'hoansi literacy materials during that year (Wendy Hövelmann, personal communication, February 2002).

So while the use of Jul'hoansi as a language of instruction in the Village Schools was a central – and exciting – part of the project for all community members, the involvement of the general community in designing the materials themselves waned early in the project. A

number of contributing factors have been noted. One was the decision to use materials that had already been mostly developed, and to limit community input to that of the teachers. Another was miscommunication between the materials developer (who also provided the training for the use of the Molteno method) on the one hand, and the VSP coordinator and teachers, on the other, as to how (or how not) to combine these materials with those the teachers had developed themselves in collaboration with their communities.

Over the course of the following years, there have been a number of efforts to develop materials in Ju'hoansi. AfriLa translated standard national mathematics, environmental studies, and language literacy textbooks for Grades 1 to 3 into Ju'hoansi; they also published a book of folk tales edited by Pfaffe and a storybook about HIV and AIDS (Pfaffe 2003; Komarek 2003; see also Hays 2006; Davids 2011). Although these efforts are well-intentioned and important, with the exception of the book of folktales (Pfaffe 2003), they do not allow room for much community involvement in the process. There is currently not a corpus of Ju'hoansi materials that can be used in schools, either for mother-tongue instruction or for the language as a subject. Those that do exist and are in use today are largely translations of mainstream materials and, while these are important, they do not reflect community values, knowledge, and lifestyles.

One challenge to the development of both Ju'hoan materials and teachers has been the lack of a tradition of literacy within the community. Davids points out that “the lack of a broader base of speakers knowledgeable in the spelling and reading of their mother tongues is a serious impediment of community efforts to promote their languages” (2011:129). The transition from an oral to literate society is a process that is often vastly underestimated (as is the process of becoming fully competent in a language of instruction that is not one's own, discussed below). The assumptions that underlie a belief in the superiority of the written over the oral lead to a lack of recognition or neglect of the sophisticated forms of local language use (see for example Street 1984; 2000). An important contribution to both the professional language development in Ju'hoansi, and the development of materials that are useful and interesting for the community, is the Ju'hoan Transcription Group (JTG). Since 2002, the JTG has been producing materials in Ju'hoansi, among other activities. This important project shifts the ‘top-down’ language development dynamic that had developed over recent years back to the ‘bottom-up’ approach that was originally intended.

The Ju'hoan Transcription Group

Started by Bieseles in 2002, with funding from the KPF, the JTG grew out of, and was made possible by, the language work that had been done in connection with the Village Schools in the early 1990s. It was designed to contribute to the schools through the creation of “printed curriculum and archival materials drawn from their own culture” (Hitchcock and Bieseles 2011:239). A major part of the project is the transcription of audio files recorded by anthropologists and others over the past several decades. Using a collaborative workshop format, a group of youth, literate in both English and Ju'hoansi, has been trained in the process of transcription, and they have transcribed several hundred sound files.

Many of these transcribed texts are drawn from the recorded interviews that Bieseles and other researchers gathered between the 1970s and the present and include folklore, descriptions of dreams, narratives of trance healing, transcripts from political meetings, oral histories, and “interviews and conversations about the NNC focusing on the environment, land rights, and new issues in governance and representation” (Bieseles and Hitchcock



Fig. 27: The Ju'hoan Transcription Group, 2010

2011:240); more recently they include the ongoing deliberations of the Nyae Nyae Conservancy with the Herero farmers, described in Chapter 2, and the collection of oral history data that contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between former hunter-gatherers and neighboring pastoralists (Bieseke et al. 2012).

The JTG members have been hired to process language materials for researchers²⁰ and have created a large body of Jul'hoansi documents. So far they have produced two published books: *Jul'hoan Folktales: Transcriptions and English Translations* (2009) and a children's dictionary by Cwi and Jones (2014), which was launched in Tsumkwe in June 2014. At that time, the members of the JTG – who by then had been working for up to twelve years – received Certificates of Training and Professional Development in recognition of the investment that they had made in their training and work over a decade (or longer in some cases).

Bieseke describes the guiding principles of the JTG and related language work as three-fold: supporting the Jul'hoan people's empowerment to tell their own stories; integration with the school curriculum of the Village Schools Project, and emphasizing respect both for ancient lifeways and for contemporary creativity (2012:5). She notes that in addition, the projects

are conservation-oriented, foster moral ownership of the creative process by Jul'hoan people themselves, and creatively use information technology. Based on sound research and full community participation, they foster educational and documentation measures to protect the Jul'hoan culture, to produce both curriculum and archives for the Jul'hoan community, and to provide publications – eventually including interlinearized Jul'hoan texts – for scholars and others via the Web. [ibid.]

Efforts are ongoing to adapt the Jul'hoansi materials for use by the ǀX'ao-ǁ'āen (Bieseke et al. 2012), and in general to modify existing materials in order to capture the linguistic diversity of the Ju language complex. The work has not been without its challenges – these include technological problems such as powering and maintaining sophisticated technical equipment in the environment of Tsumkwe and insecure internet connections, problems of transport and payment, and the social problems of jealousy surrounding employment access, high demands on literate people, and gender issues, among others – all of these have to be negotiated on an ongoing basis (ibid.). Nonetheless, the JTG is an important example of community driven collaboration with anthropologists and linguists, in which they have support to access new skills and technologies in a way that contributes to the multiple linguistic and educational goals of the community. The recent publication of the tri-lingual dictionary

²⁰ For example, the JTG processed several interviews in Jul'hoansi for the evaluation of NAMAS' San education program (Hays et al. 2010).

by Cwi and Jones (2014), copies of which have been distributed to the Village Schools, is an example of the kind of materials that such projects could produce.

Early exit models – language, culture, and ‘walking in two worlds’

While the focus on the early use of the mother tongue and home culture in the Village Schools is very important – especially for a group that has had virtually no access to mother-tongue education – we should not lose sight of the fact that this model (in which learners switch to a foreign language of instruction before they have adequately mastered it) typifies a kind of transition model called the *early exit model*. These models, which involve a transition to a foreign target language within one to four years, have been shown to work well for only a very small percentage of children (Thomas and Collier 1997; Heugh 2006). They are also the most common language-in-education models in Africa. So although the use of mother-tongue education for the Ju’hoansi in the VSP was a breakthrough for a San minority, the model that was followed has been shown, in fact, to be minimally effective – even for students who are members of more dominant social groups. Marginalized minorities are at an even greater disadvantage.

Cummins makes the distinction between two general kinds of language proficiency. Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) are the basic skills of listening and speaking in a second language which are typically acquired fairly quickly by young learners, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which refers to a child’s ability to use the language proficiently in an academic setting (1979; 2008). Based on extensive research, Cummins argues that it takes between five to seven years of immersion for a child to be working on a level with native speakers in CALP. His research has been extremely influential in understanding the language barriers that minority language students experience in education systems, even when they appear to have become fluent in the language. It is important to keep in mind that much of his research was done in North American settings in which the minority language children were immersed in the “target language,” which was spoken as a mother tongue by their fellow students. In Tsumkwe town, students come from a variety of language groups, and very few (if any) have English as a mother tongue; students at the Tsumkwe Primary School cannot be described as “immersed” in English. The recent quote by the Tsumkwe Senior Secondary School Head of Department earlier in this chapter illustrates that a lack of English language ability is one of the most significant barriers that prevents San children, including Ju’hoansi, from continuing to the higher levels of formal education.

In general, what is vastly underestimated in early-exit models, and in most current approaches to the Village Schools Project by outsiders, is the enormity of the transition that the marginalized community – in this case the Jul’hoansi students, teachers, and community – is being asked to make. The tendency to oversimplify this transition to formal education in a foreign language is one of the biggest stumbling blocks for indigenous education efforts worldwide (Henze and Vanett 1993; Aikman 1996, McCarty 2002; Boughton 2005). Even some of the most progressive approaches advocate an incorporation of “traditional values” into education systems that are fundamentally concerned with transitioning students to dominant language and cultural institutions. Henze and Vanett critique metaphors for indigenous assimilation such as “learning to walk in two worlds” as dangerously reductionist (1993). Citing their work with the Yup’ik of Alaska, they challenge the idea that students simply learn to “negotiate two cultures.” In reality, they say, the process is “an extremely complex cultural shift ... making it difficult to see coherence in either Yup’ik culture or Western culture” (199).

Kuela Kiema, a Kua man from the Central Kalahari in Botswana, describes his early school experiences, linking the difficulties caused by enormous language differences with profound cultural discontinuity:

We were taught Setswana proverbs which carried Tswana philosophies about human behavior ... We were forced to speak Setswana ... while the Bakgalagadi²¹ students followed classes with ease, we Kua were caught between two worlds. We loved our culture and customs, we loved our traditions and our history... We wanted to be educated within our cultural environment without having to disown our traditions. Slowly, but surely, Tswana culture began to influence us. Our parents saw that the school was making us disobedient and disrespectful of our traditions, and they started to complain about it ... We children began to feel torn between school culture and our family traditions. Many children, with the support of their parents, began to leave school. As a result our teachers claimed that Basarwa [San] culture didn’t approve of formal education. The truth was that the education system didn’t approve of us! [Kiema 2010:40]

In this quote, Kiema links many of the problematic aspects that San children face to schools that fail to recognize their language, or the cultures and traditions that they carry. Problems of understanding the language of instruction define the initial experience, but the denigration and undermining of one’s own culture and language in the school system sometimes

²¹ A non-dominant Bantu language in Botswana; although it is a minority language, it is close to Setswana. As Kiema points out here, it was much easier for them to learn the dominant language than for the speakers of Kua, a Khoe San language.

causes students to feel as if they have to make a choice between school, or their own family and traditions.

Kiema identifies the students who choose to leave school *not* as passive victims, or as ignorant of the value of education – but as making conscious decisions to leave a system in which they were not respected, in favor of their own language, culture, and identity. Recognizing this as a choice is very important. In the following chapters, I will return to this point. Equally important, however, is to recognize that individuals and communities should not *have* to choose. Culturally appropriate mother-tongue education for San communities is possible, and the Village Schools is an example of a community that is striving to develop this potential. One important component of this is the development of San language professionals who can work as – or together with – teachers, translators, transcribers, and authors in their own language.

“Bottom-up” language planning

Despite a comparatively favorable policy environment and the creation of some mother-tongue education materials in Jul’hoansi, realization of the goal of mother-tongue education in Jul’hoansi has been limited; likewise the hoped for positive ripple effects for mother-tongue education elsewhere in the region. There are many factors hindering this process, but three important interwoven aspects deserve emphasis. One is the lack of funding and support available for San language communities to meet their needs for either mother-tongue education, or for second-language acquisition of the dominant languages. A second is the lack of recognition for the community’s own processes, which are often overshadowed by the desire to fit the variety of language and education efforts into as few as possible standardized norms. The third is the tendency to place the blame for the lack of immediate success on the communities themselves – in particular on the teachers, as will be addressed in the next chapter.

Nancy Hornberger describes “bottom-up language planning processes” which emphasize local decision-making, control, and participation (1997). This is certainly happening at Nyae Nyae – even in cases where it may not be apparent to outsiders. As Stephen May and Sheila Aikman point out, bottom-up processes also require “top-down recognition” (2003:144). This does not only concern the development of language materials, but calls for “a new set of relations between the indigenous and non-indigenous student, and between an indigenous and non-indigenous educator/planner/policy maker” (*ibid.*).

I would like to suggest that it is a lack of “top-down” recognition of the ongoing “bottom-up” strategies that is currently one of the greatest stumbling blocks for educational

efforts in the Nyae Nyae area. The bottom-up strategies include the Village Schools – in particular the ways that the communities use these schools – and the JTG; although supported by outside NGOs, both of these initiatives are primarily community-driven, and responsive to community needs. Bottom-up strategies also include the ways that people are responding as individuals and groups to the educational and economic opportunities available to them, and the ways in which they are using languages and literacy in their daily lives. In other words – the ways that people own their own education, language and literacy processes.

In 2010, the language of instruction at Tsumkwe school was English and the language that students learned as a second language was Afrikaans; there was no mother-tongue instruction for Ju!’hoan students. When I asked a (non-Ju!’hoansi) teacher at the Tsumkwe Primary School why she thought this was, she replied:

There have been books translated into their language, but how to use them – this is a big difficulty. According to the government policy, mother tongue should be taught from Grade 1 to Grade 4 – but then who will teach? Teachers need to be trained to teach the subject ... we are talking about qualified teachers. It’s really difficult. [Interview Tsumkwe School July 2010]

While the production of mother-tongue materials is important, simply having the materials does not mean that they will be used. This teacher indicated that the problem was a lack of qualified teachers to use the materials. When we asked the principal about the possibilities for including Ju!’hoansi at the primary school in Tsumkwe, he too identified the problem as a lack of “competent” Ju!’hoan teachers. He described the profile of a Ju!’hoan teacher: “He was not trained. He was not at a [teacher training] college. He never passed Grade 10, never passed Grade 12. So we cannot expect him to give the best.” He then went on to say that “some of them dropped out from college because they were not committed ... when they are given assignments to do, they don’t do them; they don’t study for the exams ... and then many of them, they fail, and they drop out” (Interview with the Principal at Tsumkwe Primary School, 15 July 2010). Thus the use of Ju!’hoansi as a language of instruction is seen to be dependent upon having qualified teachers as the instructors, but such qualifications seem unobtainable for the Ju!’hoan teachers. This principal placed the blame for this on the teachers themselves – as have many involved outsiders. These dynamics will be explored in the following chapter.

7 Nharokxao: The teachers

It is a dry September evening in 2001, and in the air hangs a thin layer of dust and smoke from the bush fires, both set and accidental, that sweep across the veld, consuming the dry grass and blackening the bases of trees, but leaving the bush more or less intact and ready for new growth. As the sun sets shimmering red through the haze, the full moon rises brilliant orange on the other side of the village, illuminating the peaked thatch roofs of the huts. It is my first extended visit to ||Auru village; we have arrived just after the second school vacation of the year, to see how things are going with the Village School. But the teachers are not here yet, they are still in Tsumkwe. One told Hanga that his vacation was too short and he didn't want to start working again. Others have problems with transportation; there are no vehicles to bring teachers and kids where they are supposed to be. The old people say that the children are worried because if the teachers don't come, how will they learn? And how will they get food? The teacher has the key to the room with the food supply. There is no food in the village, and the people are hungry. It is the dry season, and bush food is scarce.

[Fieldnotes, September 2001]

Village Schools Objective 2: To train Jul'hoan teachers as educators of their own people

Mother-tongue instruction in Jul'hoansi, the first of the VSP cardinal objectives, requires having teachers from the Jul'hoansi-speaking community. This was the second objective and remains an extremely important component of the project, and also a very complex one for reasons that have been alluded to in the preceding chapters. Jul'hoansi who find themselves in positions of prominence (as the teachers do) must undertake a delicate balancing act in order to fulfill the numerous, and sometimes contradictory, expectations and responsibilities placed on them by various parties invested – in one way or another – in the project. They do not always succeed in maintaining such a balance. After a description of the background of the teacher selection and training since the beginning of the Village Schools, this chapter will outline some of the more problematic issues for the teachers.

In particular, I would like to recognize the role of the teachers as 'middlemen' and 'translators' (both linguistically and culturally) caught in between the demands of their communities and those of the outsiders to whom they must answer as professional teachers. Sally Engle Merry describes the dilemmas of this intermediary position, referring to Max Gluckman's (1949) observations about local headmen in British Central Africa and their position

between their communities and the colonial British authorities. She notes that his analysis of the headman provides a more general insight into the dilemma of intermediaries:

They hold power by virtue of their ability to look both ways and work with conflicting value systems. Yet they are vulnerable because the power delegated by higher authorities demands concessions resisted by villagers while the villagers make demands unacceptable to the colonial authorities. [2006:42]

Though today it is not the European colonial authorities that the teachers are under, the “school” is certainly a colonial institution in many ways, as highlighted in Chapter 3. The Village Schools teachers, most of whom speak both English and Ju’hoansi (and often other languages) are indeed in the role of translators between their communities and the institution of school. This would be a challenge even if they had completed the standard course of schooling expected of most teachers – but most of them have not. This chapter will describe the process of teacher training for the Village Schools, and also the complex dilemmas that the teachers and principal face.

Teacher training

The initial phase of the project, 1992–1993, was focused on teacher training for the twelve individuals (three women and nine men) who were nominated by the communities. These teachers had formal education ranging from Grade 2 to Grade 11 (Brörmann, 1991–1993). The early training concentrated primarily on literacy skills in both English and Ju’hoansi, and on teaching methods. At workshops, exercises such as role-playing the teachers’ experiences as students drove home the point that teaching styles at the Village Schools should be different from the authoritarian and abusive style of teaching that they had experienced themselves. Although initially they had difficulty defining their roles as teachers, through practice they developed methodologies that incorporated their own experience as children, including traditional stories, songs, and games from their communities (*ibid.*).

The teachers were also prepared for informal teaching practices in the villages and collected data from their communities about their concerns, what they wanted for their schools, and other considerations (Brörmann 1991–1993; Bieseke 1992). The communities identified as the “four main problem areas” with education: appropriate transport, suitable school clothes, accommodation, and food for the learners (Brörmann 1993:1). These are ongoing concerns, which will be discussed in Chapter 8. In addition, based on their experience in the communities and in workshop discussions, the student teachers developed three general educational principles: knowledge taught must be relevant to the learners, teaching

materials must be related to the circumstances of the Jul'hoan people, and the teaching approach has to be learner centered (2).

The plan for eventual government take-over of the Village Schools made it imperative that the teachers were working towards their official teaching certification. Originally, the plan was for the teachers to receive accreditation based solely on their in-service training. However, the ministry was adamant that the teachers must have a Grade 10 equivalency examination first – for reasons described in Chapter 5 – and that they should go through a basic teacher training program in order to be certified. In the beginning, none of the Jul'hoan teacher-trainees officially qualified for teacher training or accreditation, but the flexible policies of the Ministry of Education made special allowances for them.

In 2002, almost a decade later, there were nine teachers working in the Village Schools. Five were from the original group of twelve, these were the senior teachers who had their Grade 12 equivalency and who were working towards their teaching diplomas. The other four were junior teachers working towards their Grade 10 equivalency through the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL), a distance learning opportunity. Seven of the original teachers had left for various reasons; for example one later cited “domestic and financial” problems. Also during this period, one of the senior teachers was placed at Tsumkwe school.

By 2010, 6 years after NAMAS began supporting the Village Schools, much of their investment was focused on training teachers. Teacher uptake and training remained complicated, in particular due to the perceived clash between the goals of mother-tongue education and of having qualified teachers. By then, of the eleven teachers at Village Schools, only five were Jul'hoansi, and one had mixed parentage (Jul'hoansi and Kavango) – all of these were men. The other five, four of whom were women, included three San (two Hail'om, one !Kung) and two members of Bantu-speaking groups (one Kavango, and one Kwangali). One of the Jul'hoan teachers had been in the training program since the very beginning (he was one of the senior teachers from the era described above); two of the others had begun in the late 1990s (junior teachers from that time). Only one of the Jul'hoan teachers was still enrolled in the BETD program; the others had either dropped out or failed (Hays et al. 2010). There was no Jul'hoansi-speaking teacher at the Tsumkwe School.

Given the lack of qualified San teachers, the fact that the non-Jul'hoan teachers speak the language and have shown their commitment to teaching in Tsumkwe district is important, and they are filling necessary educational roles in the area. Based on fieldwork conducted since the non-Jul'hoan teachers began working as teachers in the Village Schools, it became clear that people in Nyae Nyae were not opposed to having non-Jul'hoan teachers. How they felt about the teachers depended on their conduct as individuals. People were unhappy,

however, with the fact that very few Ju'hoansi remained in the program, and with the difficulty those teachers were having in the formal training systems. I will return to the issue of teacher training and qualifications later in the chapter.

Gender

Of the initial teachers who dropped out, three were the women who had started at the beginning; by 2002, all of the teachers were men. In 2010, there were four women teaching at the Village Schools, but none of these was Ju'hoansi. Although gender issues are not a primary focus of this book, it is impossible not to note the lack of Ju'hoansi women among the teachers, nor the fact that those Ju'hoansi who have actually attained a level of education beyond primary level are all men. In the early years of the training program, pointed efforts were made to include women – and initially it appeared to be going well. In her report on the Creative Writing Course that was a part of the early VSP teacher training program, Biesele describes the relative gender equality among the students, noting that “the three women in the class received extra encouragement from the men students to speak up and participate, just as do women representatives and observers at the adult community meetings” (1992:9).

By 1995, a gender imbalance was already evident. The terms of reference for an anthropologist hired to advise on issues of increasing community violence notes that “a female student teacher was prevented by her husband from continuing her training” (NNDFN 1995:1); this example also came up frequently when the lack of female VSP teachers came up as a topic. After the three initial female teacher-trainees dropped out early in the program, no other women came forward. Although there were two (non-certified) pre-school teachers, both of whom were women, there were no other female Ju'hoan teachers in Nyae Nyae.¹ It was difficult to recruit women, in part because Ju'hoan girls generally drop out of school earlier than boys, resulting in a dearth of women who are in a position to begin training. It is also frequently noted that girls marry young, and thus drop out; however both Ju'hoan boys and girls cite marriage as a reason for dropping out of school.

The most common explanation I was given (by both Ju'hoansi and others) for women's lack of participation is that their husbands do not want them to work, because they (the men) are jealous. However, one Ju'hoan man (whose wife was one of the handful of employed Ju'hoan women) suggested to me that although this may be part of the explanation,

¹ In 2002, there was one Ju'hoan woman, Paula Manuel, who was in her second year of teacher training in Windhoek; however, she was not originally from the Nyae Nyae community. She went on to get her teaching degree, but has not taught in the Nyae Nyae Village Schools.

it may also have to do with choices made by the women themselves. He reported that in some cases women with small children may not have found the work compatible with the demands of child care, or that they just did not want to work. In typical Ju'hoan style, he emphasized that he did not know for sure himself, but that this may have been a problem for some women. His comments suggest that at least some women have made the choice themselves not to teach – it is not only imposed upon them by their husbands.

Gender relationships among Ju'hoansi are undergoing changes as the result of increasing incorporation into male-dominated political and economic systems, but women still do retain a great deal of autonomy (see also Lee 2006; Susser 2009). During a village meeting in Den'ui that I attended in 2002, the VISCO was encouraging the villagers to choose a woman to represent their village on the School Committee. No one wanted to step forward. At one point, my interpreter, Hanga – a young man who was from a different village – suggested that if the women are afraid to take the positions because of what their husbands might say, they must just ask their husbands. One of the older men present, a well-known hunter and respected man in the village, spoke up, saying, “No! The men who are on the School Committee didn't ask their wives! If the women want to, they must say so” (Fieldnotes, March 2002). No representative was chosen at this meeting, and it became apparent that the main concern was a balance of family representation for the community. One woman expressed willingness, but said she would not because she was from the same family as the other representative – and someone from another family must take the position. Other women and men were also suggested, but all had reasons for refusing and in the end the community decided to discuss it further among themselves. In this case it was obvious that the community's choice of representatives was about more than gender.

The quote above of the hunter from Den'ui exemplifies the Ju'hoansi reputation for gender egalitarianism, and the respect for the autonomy of individual decisions. Although these patterns are certainly changing, and there are instances of marital disputes around such positions, there does not appear to be a general pattern of male dominance that prevents



Fig. 28: ‡Oma N!ani, a teacher since the late 1990s, helps a student in ||Xa|oba Village School in 2015 (courtesy of Velina Ninkova)

most women from taking on leadership roles. The underlying reasons for the reluctance of women to put themselves in such a position are difficult to pinpoint, but are probably connected to the complex social position that the teachers put themselves into, as described in this chapter.

“We are a little bit out” – The Jul’hoan teachers

Although none of the other former teachers from the 1990s were working with the Village Schools in 2010, two of them were working with the JTG and were also working as Jul’hoansi literacy teachers for the current village schools teachers. They reported that they went to Windhoek to give Jul’hoansi literacy classes to the teachers in training who were studying there, noting that most of the teachers were “not able to read and write in Jul’hoansi – most of them are not Jul’hoansi-speaking people.” In other words, although all of them could speak it, it was not their mother tongue; they also could not read and write in the language. The former teachers said “the government nowadays requires certain qualifications, and for that, Jul’hoansi are a little bit out.”²

The 2010 evaluation report describes several issues that created difficulties for the teachers. One was the difficult role that the teachers occupied as both middlemen and cultural translators (see also Merry 2006) between all the other stakeholders in the project (including the community and the students, expatriates working for involved NGOs, Ministry representatives and other visiting officials, and the teachers and administrators of the government schools). This role included some unrealistic expectations; for example, that they would facilitate the transition of students to Tsumkwe school, without having any control over what happens at that school. The evaluation also noted that the teachers were “at the forefront of an extreme cultural transition” – and that there was not enough attention to the challenges that this role entailed (Hays et al. 2010:57).

The teachers are expected to complete the same kind of teacher training as other potential teachers in the country, although they have not had the same background or educational opportunities. Furthermore, they are expected to adopt a style of teaching and evaluation that differs – in some ways dramatically – from their own cultural styles of teaching (as described in Chapter 4), and to use materials that were designed for children from other cultures, more urban situations, and in some cases from very different countries. Although many Namibian teachers and students face such incongruencies, the culture and lifestyle of the Jul’hoansi and other San are the most under-represented in mainstream education

² Several English-speaking Jul’hoansi used this phrase – “a little bit out” – to express a sense of being unable to participate in programs or decision-making processes.



Fig. 29: Teachers Culcga Hanzi Kaesje and ꞑOma N'ani and their class in the Village School tent at ꞑOtcaqkxai in 2010

materials. Finally, the report describes problems that the teachers face with payment, noting that several had not been paid for the first part of that year (see also the section on payment below).

The report suggests that decision-making processes about the teachers and teacher training must take into consideration the difficult circumstances under which these teachers are operating, and provide tailored support addressing the particular circumstances and background of the teachers and the needs of the community. Although it was noted that San teachers struggle in general in the mainstream teacher training programs, the Ju'hoansi were “falling out” of the BETD program at the highest rates, and having the most problems coping with the requirements. In part, the report attributed this high dropout rate of the teachers to a cultural discontinuity:

This should be viewed as indicating a serious mismatch between the training programs and San culture and experience – with the Ju'hoansi at the most extreme end of a scale of incompatibility. Thus, the focus should be on finding culturally appropriate ways to help all San teachers to develop in a way that will serve their specific communities; particular attention to this is needed in the case of the Ju'hoansi. [Hays et al. 2010:58]

This has been recognized as an issue in connection with the formal teacher training program since the beginning of the efforts to incorporate the Ju/'hoansi into the formal government teacher training program (Bieseke 1993c; Brörmann 1993). One aspect of this challenge facing the teachers is negotiating the difference in teaching styles between the traditional educational strategies and culture of their home communities (described in Chapter 3), and what students will be expected to adapt to in the government school at Tsumkwe (or elsewhere). According to the original Village Schools objectives, the holistic approach of the Ju/'hoan community to teaching was to be integrated into the curriculum. As the focus shifted towards achieving accreditation from MBESC in the 1990s, the Ju/'hoan teachers received training according to the standardized form used in the mainstream education system. Although there have periodically been workshops intended to balance these approaches, reliance on mainstream teaching styles is reinforced in various ways and has a strong influence on the approach of the teachers to their classrooms and students. At the same time, the Ju/'hoan teachers were firmly entrenched in the Ju/'hoan culture and community, and intuitively use culturally appropriate approaches to teaching. Previous chapters discussed the differences between the Ju/'hoan and western approaches to learning, and how contrasting expectations can create difficult situations for the teachers and the students.

Bruce Parcher, working since 2010 for NAMAS as the Teacher Advisor, described how the content of the curriculum can also cause confusion. The BETD program places great emphasis on learner-centered education; which is meant to provide teachers with flexibility, and to encourage them to build on the foundations that their students bring to school and teach in the way that they will learn best. This matches the concept of the Village Schools, but in practice the approaches do not mesh easily. Parcher observed that the teacher-trainers are experienced in urban school settings, and are often unfamiliar with the reality that the teachers experience at the Village Schools. The curriculum itself is "full of very tightly defined objectives and competencies that the children are supposed to demonstrate" (Interview, July 2010). He illustrated with the example of Environmental Studies, which is described in the Ministry of Education curriculum as a subject that: "integrates learning about the natural and social environment, first and foremost related to the learner's immediate environment and community" (Ministry of Education 2005). Parcher pointed out that although this is a learner-centered approach, in the curriculum, it is very proscribed:

to understand the behaviors in traffic and how to behave as a pedestrian, when riding a bicycle – that's a learning objective. "Explain the dangers on or near a road and demonstrate how to cross a road safely." The competency is to identify the most important road signs for them in their local environment. And that's good. But the teachers then get confused: do I stick to the Grade 1 students' own experience and

build slowly from that, or do I need to teach them about road signs? Most of those kids don't even come to Tsumkwe³ unless they're ill. [ibid]

This confusion can lead to a lack of confidence and affect the performance of the teachers – both as teachers, and at the teacher training college. Parcher's approach has been aimed at reminding the teachers that they have the competence to make their own judgment about what will be the best way to teach the students. The need to negotiate this pedagogical transition places additional strain on the teachers, who are already under enormous pressure. The NAMAS report emphasized the need for alternative training programs, and provided suggestions for these in the recommendations – these will be discussed below.

Not all of the problems are related to cultural discontinuity. Many of the challenges the teachers face are logistical or other practical issues – issues of transportation, payment, delivery of food, communications, and other seemingly straightforward problems – except that they often become the most fundamental of reasons for why both students and teachers drop out. These logistical problems will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8. In the sections below, I will elaborate on some of the specific problems the teachers confront. Although many things have changed over the years, the consistency of some of these problems after more than two decades indicates the existence of deeper problems that are related both to cultural mismatch and wider, structural issues. I will begin with an example from 2002, about a teacher who found himself in a difficult situation and came to me seeking help.

“With great suffering”

One morning in April 2002, during the period that I lived in Nyae Nyae, I was typing up my notes in the small bare concrete house that I was using as a base in Tsumkwe, when two of the senior teachers came to see me. One of them, N!aice, had been in Tsumkwe for two weeks – I had heard that he was in town instead of in the village where he was supposed to be teaching. On this day, he explained to me that he had come to Tsumkwe at the end of March to get his salary – but was told that the post officer had made a mistake when writing in his (the teacher's) “post savings book,” (a record book in which their financial transactions were recorded and verified, often called their “post” or “savings” book, or both), and that he had sent the book back to Grootfontein – which was 300 km away, with no regular bus service – to have it corrected. The teacher was told to go collect it, and then bring it back

³ There are very few road signs in Tsumkwe – his point was to underscore how far this topic is from their experiences.

again to the post office in Tsumkwe. The conversation between us that followed reveals the difficult situation this put the teacher in (JH = author; N!aice = teacher):

JH: ... so the post officer wouldn't give you your money.

N!aice: Yes. And he said to me, if I find a car which is going to Grootfontein, I have to travel with that car and get my salary in that post ...

JH: He told you that you have to go to Grootfontein to get your money?

N!aice: Yes.

JH: But aren't you supposed to be in ||Auru teaching?

N!aice: Yes [he laughs wryly; the other teacher present also laughs]

JH: So, Beverley [the VSP Coordinator] said she would take the pay slip, and she would get your money for you when she was in Grootfontein, and bring it back to you?

N!aice: Yes. But she is not yet back.

JH: So, you are here just waiting for the money ...

N!aice: With great suffering ... I'm just here for these days waiting without some food ... [Fieldnotes, April 2002]

His wife and child were with him, and his child was sick; he had come to ask if I could loan him some money to tide him over until he could get his paycheck.⁴

Since I had begun closely following the Nyae Nyae Village School Project in the first part of 2001, the payment process for the teachers was reported to be very problematic. In 2002, the teachers were paid by monthly check, and the closest place where they could cash (as well as spend) the checks was in Tsumkwe town. In town, the only place to cash checks was at the post office – a makeshift desk inside one of the stores; often called simply “the post” as in the quote above. The teachers were supposed to work in the villages, which were located between 25 and 50 kilometers from Tsumkwe, through thick sand (for at least part of the drive), on Monday through Friday. However, the post office was often only open during the week; there were supposed to be limited hours on Saturday, but these were unreliable.

If the teachers didn't make it to town before the post office closed on Friday, they had little choice but to wait until it opened, which usually meant spending the weekend in Tsumkwe and missing school on Monday. If the post office attendant did not show up (as sometimes happened), or if they could not find a lift back to the village (as often happened), the

⁴ I spent quite a lot of time with the teachers, and had become friends with some of them; when they had financial problems they often asked me for assistance. When it was possible and reasonable for me to assist them in such a way, I did – including in this case.

stay in town might last longer. On more than one occasion – including the instance above – a teacher was told there was a problem with his post book and the post officer refused to give him his money. In such situations – which were fairly frequent – it would be unrealistic to expect the teacher to return to the community to teach, with no food or money, especially considering the unreliability of transportation. The story above is just one example of a case when – and a reason why – teachers stayed in Tsumkwe during the school week, and it provides an entry point for several issues that come up frequently with the teachers, and which I will discuss in the sections below. One is the problem of payment, which has been an issue since the beginning and continues to be one.⁵ There is also the general problem of absenteeism, which is very often linked (correctly or not) with alcohol. A third and again interconnected issue is that of food – which is noted in the excerpt from my fieldnotes at the opening this chapter, and which comes up throughout this book. Food is an issue that is related to many other concerns, including the relationships between teachers and communities. Transportation is an ongoing and central problem, which is cited frequently – it will appear in the discussions below and will be discussed at length in Chapter 8.

Alcohol and absenteeism

During the various periods of my fieldwork, a serious concern of many people – including the expatriate volunteers and NGO workers, various external evaluators, the Ju'hoansschool board and others from the community, and government officials – was that of teacher absenteeism and alcohol use, calling into question levels of commitment on the part of the teachers. Although not all absenteeism is due to alcohol, nor does alcohol use always result in absenteeism, the two issues are often linked. Many stakeholders, including government representatives, community members and donor representatives complained that some of the teachers could be found drinking alcohol in Tsumkwe on days when they were supposed to be teaching. Abuse of alcohol is a serious problem for Ju'hoan communities in general and should not be underestimated or casually tolerated. However, the deeper issues at play must be acknowledged if the situation is to be addressed effectively and without furthering negative stereotypes about alcohol abuse and the San.

One important question is the extent to which the practices of the Ju'hoan teachers differ from those of other rural teachers in Namibia. Absenteeism, alcohol use and abuse are certainly not limited to the VSP teachers; these problems are commonly noted among teachers and principals in the government schools around the country, especially in rural

⁵ Included a recent list of informal recommendations for the Village Schools was: “Make check cashing a possibility in Tsumkwe so that village teachers do not have to travel/hike to Grootfontein” – indicating that this is still a serious issue (Heckler, personal communication July 2015).

areas, and the Tsumkwe district is no exception. This is not lost on the Jul'hoansi, who often feel that they are unfairly singled out for criticism. Those who I interviewed on the topic made a clear distinction between drinking on their "off-time" – which technically should not be considered an offense in itself – and drinking when they were supposed to be teaching, which they understood to be irresponsible. Although this distinction is reasonable, there are a number of ways in which it becomes blurred. When teachers find themselves "stuck" in Tsumkwe in situations such as the one described above – are they "on" or "off" duty? They are supposed to be at the school teaching, but often for reasons over which they do not have control, they are in Tsumkwe. In some cases (though not necessarily in the one described earlier), once it became apparent to a teacher that he was not going to make it back for school on a given day, he might decide it would be okay to have a drink – since he was "off." A predictable result, however, was that they were seen drinking in town, on a school day. To the criticized teacher, the decision to drink was justified (especially when one had no money and was offered the cheap and filling local home brew to drink – see Chapter 2). To others who saw him, it became yet another example of the irresponsibility of the Jul'hoan teachers.

Community expectations

The ways in which a recent tradition of strict equality such as the Jul'hoansi had practiced, and related understandings of fairness, express themselves in circumstances of increasing *inequality*, in which a few individuals are promoted above others, can undermine even the most carefully planned, researched, and consultative projects (see Biesele 1994, 1995). These reactions include jealousy on the part of some community members directed towards others who gain increased social and economic status. This jealousy can be expressed as resentment towards the "successful" ones, as overt or subtle refusal to cooperate with them, or as increased pressure upon them to share food or material wealth.

This resentment, resistance, and pressure takes its toll on those who are in the position of teacher, literacy promoter, or any of the other jobs with the government or NGOs that are ultimately focused upon "helping" the community. Because jobs are scarce, those who do have a cash income often find themselves increasingly trapped by a multiplicity of demands. In particular, there is pressure to share the resources gained by having an income. This can be particularly problematic for the teachers and the adult literacy promoters, who are often posted in villages that are not their own. These individuals are thus expected to assist financially the members of their immediate families who stay with them, and also their own extended families who live in different villages; on top of this they are pressured by the community members of the village in which they work to "help" them by sharing money, tobacco, food, or other items with them.

After witnessing these constant requests for help to one young teacher in a village, early in my fieldwork, I asked how this affected him. He responded, “it is hard ... you see, we are teachers and we are supposed to work the whole day, we do not have time to go out in to the veld to get food, that is why we are paid” (Fieldnotes, November 2001). In 2011, another man who worked at the CLDC Library in Tsumkwe and received a salary, said to me, “in the old days, there were no salaries, people just shared with each other. It is the same today, if you have a salary you have to share. It is like sharing the meat that you get from hunting” (Fieldnotes, November 2011). This dynamic is not necessarily considered problematic by the person receiving the salary; the relationship with those making the demands is a critical factor. For teachers in villages that are not their own, the sharing patterns must be negotiated and this can create tensions.

A cash income does not really equate with hunting and gathering as a means of subsistence, however, for a salary is (despite the problems described in this chapter) more consistent than the availability of veld-food or the irregular income from crafts and tourism, and the status of purchased items is higher than that of bush foods. If the teacher cannot or does not share with other village residents, they resent it greatly, and relations between the teacher and the villagers can become very strained. The tensions introduced by the inequality of fellow Ju’hoansi staying in the village with a cash income, when the others have none, can interfere with long-range planning and educational goals. The pressure that individuals experience is not only financial; the weight of the hopes and expectations of the communities, and of the many outsiders who have invested in training and support for these individuals, rests on their shoulders.

Furthermore, in addition to their other responsibilities, the teachers were expected to negotiate increasingly difficult problems between community members. The terms of reference for the anthropologist hired by the NNDFN in 1995 to research and advise on issues involving community violence noted that

during the course of the in-service training it became apparent that the student teachers have had problems with adequate disciplinary approaches when learners were fighting amongst each other. They also had to find solutions for problematic situations created by demanding or drunken community members ... fights between Ju’hoan men, battering of women, slapping of children and attempted suicides seem to be increasing within the Ju’hoan society of Nyae Nyae. [1]

When one considers the variety of outsiders who are interested in the VSP, the number of external researchers or evaluators who visit the area, and the constant surveillance by their own communities, we could imagine the teachers caught in the ever-present glare of

spotlights coming from all directions. This can be a very uncomfortable position, and if the strain becomes unbearable, some individuals may simply decide to drop out.

This situation is not limited to the teachers, but is also true of the adult literacy promoters and others in prominent positions within the conservancy (all of which are associated with a certain level of formal education). A number of Ju'l'hoansi who are literate and who have held jobs as teachers or literacy promoters have simply decided to withdraw from that position and stay in their villages. During the course of my long-term research in Nyae Nyae, I watched many individuals who had the opportunity and potential to assume a position of authority or leadership withdraw at critical moments. The withdrawal often (though not always) involved alcohol. The individual might become extremely drunk just before critical events, such as a local election in which they were running, or a large meeting that they were supposed to convene (the election went to a non-Ju'l'hoan candidate; the meeting didn't get held). Others have simply behaved in ways that were blatantly unacceptable, such as going on long drinking binges, engaging in violent behavior, failing to show up for their classes, or disappearing for weeks on end – repeatedly, until those responsible for their employment were left with little choice but to terminate their contract. I must emphasize that this does not describe all the teachers. Nevertheless, all of the Ju'l'hoan teachers during my various research periods were in difficult positions.

When the factors described above are considered, “bad behavior” begins to look like an effort to creep out of the spotlight and melt back into the chorus. Bieseles, quoting Wiessner, provides an important perspective on the situation affecting these individuals:

In Ju'l'hoan society it is hard for someone who achieves something which puts her apart from others to enjoy it. As one Ju'l'hoan told Polly Wiessner (personal communication), if she stands tall “she will bump her head against the sky” (asserting oneself incurs the jealousy of other community members). Ju'l'hoan people, including those currently grappling with recent chances at unequal privilege, are only too aware of this strong feature of their society. They ask themselves, “are special benefits worth losing status as an ordinary member of my society?” They weigh literacy, vehicle access and salary privileging against the familiar comforts of fair sharing and the security and “anonymity” it conveys. [1995:5]

Wiessner has described how those in strong positions within the community will sometimes behave in “foolish” ways in order to remain “one of the boys;” getting drunk in such cases may be an important “self-leveling” mechanism (2005:129). Bieseles’s observation that the pressure of being in such a position became overwhelming to some Ju'l'hoansi in positions of authority, and that such individuals might as a result decide not to work any longer, matches what I have observed.

The idea that behaving in unacceptable ways was a mechanism through which the teachers escaped the compromised situation they were in occurred to me several times during the course of my fieldwork. I was nonetheless surprised when it was clearly articulated by former teachers themselves in 2010. While conducting fieldwork for the NAMAS evaluation, Le Roux and I talked with some of the former Village School teachers who were with the JTG and training some of the new teachers in Jul'hoansi literacy. They discussed the problems that they knew Jul'hoan teachers faced in the villages. Although they presented these as general experiences they knew teachers faced, they were clearly also speaking from personal experience.

Many of the issues they described revolved around food, or sharing – or both. They recalled hearing villagers quarrelling with teachers about food, and one man described it like this: if the village is a large one, the teacher inevitably lives closer to some villagers than others, and thus shares more with them. If the other villagers perceive themselves as getting less food from the teacher, “they get angry.” If then, “the teacher goes and stays alone, outside of the community, then it is another problem again – people complain that he doesn't stay with them.” The teachers had no comfortable solution within that community. However, it could be difficult to transfer to another village – this required the rearrangement of all the teachers and did not usually happen immediately. The ex-teachers reported that this kind of situation could make one want to quit. One described what a teacher might do if he were having problems with the community he was living in:

[S]ometimes, some teachers – especially if he is in a place that is not preferred – might keep on doing things that force the principal to fire him ... he is stressed, and was forced back there, so this is the reason that some of the teachers try to get fired. Then they are free. [Interview, July 2010]

When we asked what kind of things teachers would do to get fired, he sat forward in his seat and replied in a calm, even tone, emphasizing each “we know”:

We know that in schools corporal punishment is not allowed, and absenteeism is a problem. We know that taking alcohol during working hours is a problem. We know that if you are absent, and the inspector is there; or if your lesson plans and register are not ready, if you are not prepared – these things might cause someone to be fired. [ibid.]

I must again be clear – not *all* of the teachers, or other Jul'hoansi in leadership positions, engage in this behavior, and not all of the time even for those who do. But generalizations are made quickly, with the result that the teachers – in particular the Village Schools teachers – find themselves under intense scrutiny and with very little margin for error. At some

points over the years, some teachers have been seen drunk in town in the middle of a school day enough times by enough people to have established a general reputation of being “irresponsible,” “lazy,” “not serious” or even “drunkards.” This reputation does not sit well with many people, including the principals of the local government schools, other involved government officials, donors, potential project donors, and community members.

For this reason, I considered carefully whether or not to include the above quote in this book; in the wrong light, it could be interpreted as support for all the negative stereotypes that the teachers have had assigned to them over the years. I decided to include it because it underscores some important points I would like to make. One is the pressure that the teachers feel themselves to be under – and the lack of options that they have. The lack of sufficient numbers of trained and working teachers over the years has allowed for neither the flexibility in placement, nor for replacement of those who left or were absent (nor did it facilitate the staffing of more village schools or a pool of Jul’hoan teachers that might move to mainstream schools, both of which were original goals of the project). Teachers are often overburdened and lonely in villages away from home. Against this background, I would like now provide a different perspective, contrasting the real problems and the stereotypes described above with an illustration of the persistence with which many of the teachers do face their responsibilities.

Payment of teachers

The story earlier in the chapter about the teacher stuck in Tsumkwe without his salary in 2002 was not an isolated incident, but an ongoing problem. The payment of teachers has been an issue since the beginning of the VSP – logistically, socially and culturally. The basic practice of receiving, cashing, and spending their paychecks seems to become enormously complicated, for varying reasons. Even under normal payment circumstances, when their bank books were in order and the check was waiting for them as it was supposed to be, teachers were still expected to get from the villages to Tsumkwe, collect their check, shop, and get back to the village within a period of time that did not interfere with their teaching. Frequently, this was not possible.

In 2010, when we were conducting research for NAMAS, the issue had become even more problematic. Most of the teachers had experienced extreme delays in their payment, sometimes for months; some were still not paid at the time we were there in July – seven months after the start of the school year. There were two categories of teachers supported by NAMAS at that time. Some were in the BETD program; their salary was paid by the government on an annual basis – each year they had to reapply for the position. In

2010, four of the teachers who had been hired by the Regional Office did not receive their salary from January 2010 until several months into the second term. They continued teaching nonetheless.

The teachers whose salaries had been taken over by the government during a transition of responsibility in April 2010 (see Chapter 9) had still not received their pay at the time of our research in July. Both groups of teachers said that they experienced serious hardship as a result of this. They had been purchasing food and other needed items on credit from shopkeepers, and when we were there, this credit was being called in – but the teachers still did not know when they would be paid. The principal of the Village Schools was trying to address the situation; he had written letters to the appropriate offices, but he had still not received a response by July, more than halfway through the school year (see also below). Although the problem was rectified eventually, a point that I want to underscore here is that throughout this period these teachers continued teaching. Over the years, many teachers have demonstrated a high level of commitment to their job, continuing to work for weeks and sometimes months without being paid.

Money and relationships with the community

In addition to the logistic problems with payment, as has been described above, the way that a salary affects relationships with the communities is a difficult issue for teachers to negotiate. *Who* should be paid to do *what* and how this fits with cultural conceptions of equality has also created logistical problems for teachers and for project coordinators. When Le Roux visited Nyae Nyae in 1998 as a part of her regional study, parents in the villages complained that the teachers were being paid – but the other villagers were expected to work for free, for example as cooks for the school (personal communication). When I was there in 2001–2002, the fact that the teachers were making money was in some places a divisive issue. This was not just the case for the Village Schools teachers, but also for the adult literacy promoters, one of whom told me that his class said that if he did not share his payment with them, they were going to stop coming to the class. Another reported that she was expected to bring drinks and food each time as ‘payment’ to her adult literacy students for coming to class. When we talked to the former teachers in 2010, one described a situation in which community members accused the teacher of “eating the money they get from sending their kids to school.” Since the parents were providing the salaries of the teachers by sending their children to the school, the teacher was under certain obligations to share with them; the accusation indicates that they did not feel he was doing so.

These dynamics seem to explain some of the difficulties teachers have staying in the communities where they are posted. It is important not to generalize, however, as my field

assistant Hanga pointed out after listening with me to several stories about teachers not being in the villages they were supposed to be teaching in. He noted that the dominant perception among the community is that “once people get educated, when they have skills like reading and writing, they then think only about themselves and about getting money and status.” But, he said, this is not always the case.

[S]ometimes the community says things like: you are getting money from us, so if we take our kids away, or stay away from adult education, you will not get money. You must give us money to help us, and we will help you by sending our kids to school. So sometimes when the teachers leave it is because they are hurt, and are having trouble with the community. And, sometimes, it is because they want to make money or live their own lives. [Fieldnotes, November 2001]

There are a variety of ways in which teachers experience problems stemming from their salaried positions and the effect that has on relationships with the communities. Although there are recognizable patterns, the teachers respond to these patterns as individuals.

The problems that I observed and that were recounted during my various fieldwork periods were articulated by Bieseke, one of the founders of the Village Schools and also of the JTG (see Chapter 6) with whom she has been working since 2002. In 2010, she described what she saw as the most problematic issues for the teachers, based on her years of experience and observation in the area:

Mostly, the teachers were put in an untenable social situation. The school feeding wouldn't arrive or it would arrive and it was so small ... there was a hungry community that ate it up quickly ... and then everybody dropped out of school including the teachers. And the teachers' pay either came irregularly, or they were so far out in the bush that they didn't have transport to pick it up in Tsumkwe when it was here. [Interview, 16 July 2010]

Food and transportation are recurring problems that interfere with the functioning of the schools and with the transition to Tsumkwe school; these will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8. Bieseke emphasizes social problems as well:

[P]lus there were things that we probably should have anticipated, such as the fact that the teachers were the focus of envy in the communities because they were the only ones being paid. Everybody down to the old grannies was coming up to them and saying, “Share your salary.” And so the teachers were sharing their salary, because they're Ju'hoansi. But they were hungry and they were cold and they were raggedy ... And they gave everything away and they were in the same position as anybody else in the community and maybe even worse because they had something to give away, and so they gave it away. [Interview, 16 July 2010]

It is difficult to overemphasize the delicate social and economic situation that the teachers and principal are in. It may also be difficult for non-San readers and researchers to fully understand the kind of social pressure they are under. Much of this pressure has to do with the contradictory expectations they face. They are expected to function as leaders and individual role models and to manage a wage income, in a small-scale egalitarian community in which it is not acceptable to stand out above others, to tell others what to do, or to hoard resources. They are often the only ones with a regular salary living in a community that practices “demand sharing” (see Barnard 2000). They are supposed to be in the same place every day, at the same time, and ensure that others are too, in a community in which being mobile and flexible is an important survival strategy.

When the cultural discontinuity that this creates goes unrecognized, the teachers are characterized negatively and blamed, and they do not receive the support that they need to cope with the situation. Though mobility and flexibility may be adaptive to a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, they are not appreciated within most labor markets. The Jul’hoansi, and the San in general, are often singled out as being particularly ‘irresponsible’ about work; other adjectives often used are ‘lazy’ and ‘unreliable.’ Cases that contradict this stereotype are not usually recognized – the lack of payment over several months described above clearly contributed to low teacher morale, a perceived lack of support, and living hardships in some cases – but the teachers continued teaching, although they may very well have been absent some days. That example also illustrates another very important point I would like to make. Although the Jul’hoan teachers are held to the same standards as other teachers – the conditions for them to fulfill these expectations are often not there. At this point I would like to reflect on these expectations as we consider the specific case of the Village Schools Principal.

The Village Schools Principal

The Jul’hoan principal of the Village Schools, Cwisa Cwi, is an even more central figure than the teachers – he is in many ways at the nexus of the whole web of relationships around education in the Tsumkwe district. Prior to Cwi’s appointment, from 1998 Andreas Haikera, the principal of Aasvoëlne school (outside of the Conservancy) served as principal of the Village Schools. Although not Jul’hoan himself, Haikera had grown up in the area and spoke fluent Jul’hoansi, he also had experience as a teacher and had been principal of Aasvoëlne since 1993. Nevertheless, having this dual principal post was problematic – the Village Schools were a huge job to administer and needed their own principal. Cwi was the first person from his community to be trained as a teacher. He taught for a year before becoming

the deputy principal of the Village Schools, working with Haikera from 2005. Two years later, in 2007, Cwi was made the principal of the Village Schools. Despite his training, he had far less teaching experience than most starting principals, and he did not receive the adequate administrative support and training necessary to become a principal. Not only was he expected to take on a position that normally would require many more years of service and training, he is also in a unique and difficult position as a principal – responsible for multiple schools in hard to reach areas.

In a 2010 interview, the School Inspector for the Otjozondjupa region, sympathetic to the situation of the principal, emphasized Cwi's need for support:

He was just thrown in at the deep end ... I don't think he had a lot of experience teaching in the classroom or managing a school ... and it's not one school. It's five or six schools out there in the bush. And they are moving, the learners are moving with the parents ... So it's not as if you can walk into your school every morning, and there's your staff, there's your office. There are new challenges every day. So he needs some support and especially transport because he needs to go to the schools very often. [Interview, July 2010]

The principal had no phone line, fax, or photocopying machine; when I have met him over the past years (most recently in 2014) he was communicating primarily via his mobile phone (which is occasionally borrowed by others, or the number is exchanged). Nor does he have access to regular transport. In 2010, he described how, when he needed a vehicle for school visits or other work-related purposes, he must request a car from Grootfontein. Others in the district also share that vehicle, and the requests from Tsumkwe do not always take priority. Furthermore, communication between the offices is a serious problem. The principal described it like this:

Most of the times when I request a car, I get no answer. Then maybe I will find that, oh, the car is here, but they did not tell me that the car was coming, so I could not plan on it ... Then sometimes I plan on my activities, and I request the car. But then people are using the car for the other things. So my programs are just sitting there ... [Interview, July 2010]

This is not the only example of his communications with the regional education offices not being answered in a timely way. For example, early in the 2010 school year it became clear that the school food that had been delivered in January would not last for the term (this issue is discussed further in Chapter 8). On March 10, less than two months into the school term, Cwi wrote a letter about this to the Inspector of Hostels, Otjiwarongo, and also sent a copy to the Director of Education, Otjozondjupa region and to the Inspector of Education, Grootfontein circuit:



Fig. 30: The Village Schools Principal, Cwisa Cwi, in his office in Tsumkwe, 2010

In my capacity as Principal of the Nyae Nyae Village Schools, I would like to inform you about my visit to the Village Schools. The numbers of learners are increasing and the food which they received cannot last until the day when the schools close ...We now have six schools altogether with 187 learners, but the lack of school feeding program will make them disappear and lose out on Education. This term we have received 125 maize bags which we have to divide among six schools. [letter, March 10, 2010]

He did not get a response to this letter. However, when he showed it to me in July, he had attached to it the receipt of the school food delivery for the following term – 116 bags of maize meal. Thus, the actual response was the delivery of *less* food the following term. This may have been due to a lack of communication, lack of resources, or a lack of respect for the principal and the situation – the reason was never made clear.

Cwi is also supposed to be responsible for the Village Schools students who transition to Tsumkwe:

As the kids are coming from the Village Schools to Tsumkwe, as a principal, I have to make sure that they've got accommodation, they've got classes, that there are desks and chairs at school. Whenever they have problems, they have to come to me, and I have to solve these problems or take it to the higher authorities – I have to look after them because anything that will happen to these children, parents are going to point fingers to me. [Interview, July 2010]

Often learners report not having beds, mattresses, blankets or chairs to sit on in the classrooms (this is confirmed by school employees). Arranging accommodation, furniture and such things for the children at TPS is *not* the mandate of the principal of the Nyae Nyae Village Schools – it is the responsibility of the Tsumkwe Primary School administration. But because it is a major reason that kids drop out, it becomes an area over which the Village Schools principal feels responsibility, and which others seem to hold him responsible for. Unfortunately, he, like the teachers, has no control over what happens at the Tsumkwe Primary School, nor is he in a position of authority over the children. It is not realistic to expect him to take on this responsibility.

In addition to these logistical and communicational challenges, Cwi faces the same social pressure as the teachers. He gets little recognition or support for maintaining his position regardless of this pressure – to the contrary, he seems to be an easy target for criticism from the communities, the teachers, education officials from the Ministry, and development workers in the area. He emphasized to us in 2010 that, without technical support from NAMAS he would not be able to function as principal. Even with support, he has struggled.

The teachers and the principal are expected to perform like other teachers, although they are working under unusual and difficult conditions, and do not have adequate resources, social support or counseling. When they do not fulfill all the numerous and contradicting expectations placed upon them by the various other parties involved, they are the focus of intense criticism. To government officials, teachers and principals from other schools in the area, and development workers working with the project, their absenteeism, alcohol use, and other “failings” are often taken as further evidence that they “aren’t serious” and the blame gets focused there.

I am not arguing here that the Ju’hoan teachers and principal do not sometimes behave in problematic ways – of course they are human and they do sometimes make choices that have negative repercussions for themselves, their relationships, other community members, or the schools. However, they do not do so more than teachers or principals from other ethnic groups – including those at the schools in Tsumkwe who behave in ways that are often far more serious (see the Afterword for a recent example). Equally important, the approaches proposed to address the problems have in the past usually been dis-

ciplinary in nature with little or no recognition of the intense social negotiation that the Ju'hoan teachers are in the midst of or the challenges they must endure. This approach did not lead to an increase in teachers from the Ju'hoan community, in accordance with the original goals.

Qualifications

As described at the beginning of this chapter, when the Village Schools Project was being developed in the 1990s, there were good reasons for the emphasis on the Ju'hoansi teachers receiving the same formal qualifications as anyone else, and efforts were made to develop a program that allowed them to find entry points into this system. After over 20 years, however, it has become apparent that the mainstreaming approach is not having the intended results. The goal of adequately preparing Ju'hoansi and other San learners ultimately to succeed in mainstream schools requires having teachers that are qualified to teach within those systems. This goal of entry into the mainstream system tends to overshadow the other equally important set of goals, which include drawing upon the learners' language and culture, and maintaining awareness of social and economic realities.

As Haikera described it in 2010, the requirement of proficiency in Ju'hoansi for the Village Schools teachers functioned as a kind of "affirmative action," ensuring that speakers of Ju'hoansi would be prioritized in the selection process, as well as ensuring that the language would be used as the medium of instruction in the Village Schools. However, during the transition of the Village Schools to the government in 2003–2004 (described in Chapter 9), he notes, "this policy changed. The requirement changed. So automatically, [the Ju'hoansi] fell out because they did not meet the requirement ... it also jeopardized the whole training program, and the mother tongue instruction" (Interview, 14 July 2010).

An important recommendation of the NAMAS evaluation report in 2010 was that the goal of increasing the number of mother-tongue teachers (speakers of Ju'hoansi) should be separated from the goal of increasing the numbers of formally qualified teachers working in Tsumkwe district. It was recommended that different and appropriate strategies be taken to reach each goal. There are two important aspects to this; that of mother-tongue education and the need for teachers from the speech community. Thus, for the Village Schools, with its emphasis on Ju'hoansi education, it is important to distinguish between the following categories: San teachers from other language groups, teachers who speak Ju'hoansi as a second or subsequent language, and teachers who are Ju'hoansi and speak the language as a mother tongue. While teachers in all of these categories are important and in need of cultivation and support, it is the Ju'hoansi students and teachers who struggle the most with

the formal system. An issue that has come up repeatedly in research over the past several years is the fact that Ju'hoansi themselves are “falling out” (or some said “pushed out”) of teacher training programs. This was perceived as especially problematic given the emphasis on the cultivation of Ju'hoansi teachers in the initial design of the VSP, and throughout the ten years of its operation before transition to the Ministry. One of the original objectives of the project has been compromised as the focus shifted to ensuring that teachers were formally qualified.

A second point is to distinguish between qualified teachers and good teachers, as pointed out by the NAMAS teacher advisor in 2010. He noted, based on his years of teaching experience in Namibia, as well as his initial experience and observations in the Nyae Nyae area, that:

...an untrained, unqualified teacher can sometimes do a better job than a qualified teacher who doesn't have a full grasp of the language ... Mother-tongue instruction at the early childhood level, as many researchers suggest, is greatly to the children's advantage. There is no one better to do that than a Ju'hoansi himself or herself, and they could do it better than someone who simply speaks the language. [Hays et al. 2010:59]

He also noted that, in general, the issue of “certification” can sometimes distract people from the fundamental issue of teaching quality: “a certificate means a lot to some people. But a good teacher without a certificate is better than a bad teacher with a certificate” (ibid:60). He reported that several of the unqualified Ju'hoansi were, in fact, very good teachers.

What kind of teachers?

After elaborating on the various needs of the community, the NAMAS evaluation report suggests three categories of teachers that are needed for the Ju'hoan community. Although these categories are not mutually exclusive, they require different strategies for identification, training, support, and placement. It was recommended that a priority should be the identification and cultivation of *good teachers from the San/Ju'hoan community*, with a complementary focus on the identification and ongoing support of *good teachers who are familiar with and sensitive to the San/Ju'hoan culture and who speak the relevant language*. Finally, it was suggested that there should be room for *good, qualified teachers who are sensitive to the San/Ju'hoan culture* (even if they are not themselves San), and interested in working in the area. It was further recommended that an official qualification be developed for *Ju'hoan language experts* who can work with learners in the Village Schools and Tsumkwe schools, even if they are not officially qualified teachers. The report suggested that “if skills

in the Ju/'hoansi language are recognized as a legitimate skill and a qualification developed for this skill, then a qualified Ju/'hoan language expert could teach alongside a government-certified teacher, and their complementary skills could enrich the teaching and learning experience" (Hays et al. 2010:62).

In light of the obvious difficulties that the Ju/'hoan teachers are having in the mainstream programs, the report recommended that a specialized teacher training program should be developed to support the Ju/'hoansi and other San teachers who want to teach in their communities. Ideally, such a training program could also link with a variety of other educational, training, and employment initiatives including the Bachelors of Education program at the University of Namibia (UNAM) in Windhoek, adult education, curriculum and materials development programs, and link with other community-based education programs. Striking a balance in the teacher-training programme between the dual priorities of gaining access to mainstream education, languages and skills, and building upon traditional culture has been difficult to achieve – in part because of the gap between the teacher training programme and the teachers' experiences in the Village Schools; which often leaves teachers unprepared for the circumstances they encounter.

A specialized approach that focuses on developing the confidence of San teachers to teach mainstream subjects in a way that matches their own cultural background and that of their students was an integral part of the initial project design. The incorporation of the teachers into the mainstream teacher training system has overall resulted in a move away from this goal, as few Ju/'hoansi have been able to meet the teacher training requirements. NAMAS' most important contribution over the years of its involvement has been the support of the teachers – this remains an area in which much support is needed.

8 Logistics: Transportation, accommodation and food

The decision about where to put the schools was a kinship-based consultation process ... we had to think about distances; we had to think about transport; we had to think about relationships. And we had to think about getting kids [from other villages] home on the weekends. We had to think about getting supplies to the schools – we had to be able to drive a truck there.

[Bieseke, interview, July 2010]

This is very, very important – you must write this down. We keep telling people who come here that what we need is transport, but we don't think that the people in Windhoek are getting the message. Maybe Baraka¹ is not telling people there what we are really saying.

[Fieldnotes, April 13 2002]

Village Schools Objective 4: To continue building school facilities close to villages so that the young learners can learn and live in a familiar environment during their first three school years

The recent International San Education Conference, sponsored by NAMAS and held in Tsumkwe had the subtitle: *Ancient Wisdom, Modern Perspectives: Parent and Community involvement in Education and Learning*. At this meeting, different stakeholders in San education came together to discuss how better to involve parents in educational efforts. These included representatives from the Regional Education Office, practitioners and representatives from NGOs, academics from the University of Namibia and from overseas, and San community representatives. The conference also included participants from other San communities (including three Khwe participants from Botswana); however the main focus was on the Village Schools. Ju'hoansi–English translation was provided throughout the conference.

Although very many ideas and perspectives were presented at this conference, some general themes defined the discourses of the main categories of role-players present. The government participants, from both the national and the regional education offices, primarily emphasized the importance of going to school, the responsibility of the parents, and the need to “understand the value of education.” The representative from the Ministry of Education urged parents to “seize the opportunities that are available to them”

¹ Here “Baraka” means those responsible for the Village Schools, as the headquarters was in that village at the time of this quote.

by sending their children to school, and by engaging with the Tsumkwe school (Fieldnotes June 2014).

Participating academics² focused on the history of the project, the value and legitimacy of traditional knowledge and pedagogical styles, the importance of community involvement in decision-making processes, and indigenous education rights. For example, Mbukusa and Nekongo-Nielsen (2014) described their recent study focusing on San children in another part of Namibia, and highlighted the “tension” between the educational opportunities available and “the culture of the San communities” and the importance of including the language and the indigenous knowledge of the learners within the curriculum design (8).

NAMAS was the most visible NGO present, as the hosts of the conference and the main supporters of the project. An important goal for the organization was of course to find a practical way forward for the Village Schools, as an important aspect of educational improvement in Nyae Nyae and also as a model for San communities elsewhere in Namibia and Botswana. Although generating a clear outcome and action plan from the conference was important, there was also clear recognition of the importance of community participation, and acceptance of the project. Olav Osland, then director of NAMAS, linked practical success with an understanding of what the Jul’hoansi expect from the school, arguing that the community should “take the lead” in how the project develops: “First we need to really understand them, and what they want” (Fieldnotes June 2014). It was for this reason that NAMAS had decided to hold the conference in Tsumkwe itself – in order to ensure the participation of Jul’hoan parents, students, and Village Schools teachers.

Almost all of the input of these participating community members had to do with practical issues involving food, the hostel, and daily relations with the Village Schools teachers. They acknowledged the importance of education – this was never in question. But the main focus of the parents was on the barriers that they and their children confronted at the Tsumkwe school; on the availability of food in the villages and at Tsumkwe school; on the hostel conditions; and on the difficulty navigating the social relations described in the previous chapter – particularly regarding food and relations with the teachers. One mother responded to the speech by the representative of the Ministry of Education (described above) noting that, that while she agreed that they should take the children to school:

We mothers, we cannot speak English. So if our kid is chased from school back home, we don’t know what to do ... Something else that I want to mention is that if the principal calls a parent meeting, and if we go to that meeting, there is no local language used there. So we don’t have a chance to speak. [Fieldnotes July 2014]

² Including the author

The conference was their chance to speak, with its focus on the inclusion of Ju'hoansi parents and provision of translation. In a discussion session after a presentation by the Chief Tsamkxao ǀOma, several parents made impassioned comments about a number of issues (these, as well as the quote above, were translated into English by Kallie N!ani, one of the former teachers). First, there was concern that the school food was not being distributed properly, and there were questions about who authorized the distribution. Another issue of concern had to do with how many mattresses and blankets were available at the Tsumkwe school hostel, as this was a reason that children were coming back home. Some specific problems with Village Schools teachers were also raised. These were the day-to-day issues that the Ju'hoan participants felt needed to be resolved in order for either the Village Schools or transition to Tsumkwe school to work the way it had been envisaged.

The Village Schools

The Nyae Nyae Ju'hoansi decided the location of the original schools, and they were placed in villages carefully chosen to maximize community involvement. To promote their ownership over the schools, the communities themselves were to build them. A 1993 quarterly report notes that this did not happen by the end of 1992 as envisaged,³ and ultimately a builder was hired to construct the schools and the community assisted (Brörmann 1994). One building already existed at Baraka (the headquarters of the Conservancy and the VSP) and was used for a school, and three more schools were built in ǁXaloba, ǀAqbase, and ǁAuru in 1993 and 1994. Two pre-fabricated school buildings were donated by Namibian businesses and erected in Denlui and ǁAuru in 1994. The school at ǀAqbase closed because of lack of water, and a new one opened at ǀOtchaqkxai – which also subsequently closed because of problems accessing water. Schools have recently opened in Nhoma (2010) Bens se Kamp, and Duin Pos (both 2014); large tents are used for these schools until permanent structures are in place. Schools have opened and closed over the years, depending on the availability of teachers and supplies and the movements of people to or from the village – usually related to water and food availability, or sometimes elephants.

While the concept of village schools is central to the project – indeed, it is the identifying characteristic – in practice several issues complicate the successful implementation of this model. This chapter focuses on the logistical challenges that hinder the smooth functioning

³ In what the report describes as “a true learning process for all parties involved” it became clear that the communities’ motivation to build the schools was primarily economic, either to earn money directly, or to gain skills with which they could later gain employment (and brick-laying was recognized as having little such value). The report states that, as formal education seems to be “very abstract” for the communities, they were not motivated by a sense of contributing to a community project (Brörmann 1993).



Fig. 31: Den\ui Village School, donated in 1993 by the Rossing Foundation, seen here in 2003 (Courtesy of Catherine Collett, KPF)

of the Village Schools. These are closely connected with the social challenges; the previous chapter, for example, described the feelings of isolation and lack of support teachers often express in remote villages. Another concern about the Village Schools model is that it serves to increase the isolation of the Jul'hoansi from mainstream society, rather than to foster healthy integration, either among Jul'hoansi from different parts of the Conservancy, or with other groups (Wiessner 2004). The fact that they are separated in the Village Schools may work against a sense of larger solidarity when they meet at the Tsumkwe Primary School (TPS) in Grade 4. These issues will be discussed in Chapter 10.

The high dropout rate of Village Schools' students at the TPS is often blamed on the Village Schools model or on the teachers. In Chapter 9 I argue that the environment at the school in Tsumkwe is problematic and attention should be focused there as well. Many of the logistical challenges confronting the Village Schools also prevent learners from staying at TPS. There are three issues that resurface regularly when Nyae Nyae Conservancy members are asked about education. These are *transportation*, *accommodation*, and *food*. In this chapter, these logistical aspects of the transition to Tsumkwe school are addressed along with the difficulties they create for teachers, communities and students at the Village Schools.

Transportation

Getting people where they need to be in order to attend, teach, or administer the Village Schools, and moving between the villages and Tsumkwe for other education-related purposes, pose major logistical difficulties for the Nyae Nyae communities and their supporting organizations. The quote at the beginning of the chapter is one example of numerous occasions throughout my research in Nyae Nyae when people identified lack of transportation as the main reason that they or their children were not where they were supposed to be. When asked what they see as their most serious need with regards to education, Jul'hoansi in the Nyae Nyae area frequently said they needed access to vehicles, either for their village or for the project, to transport children to and from school. They experience the lack of transportation as one of the biggest barriers to their own and their children's participation in school. The main problems include: transport to and from the Village Schools for learners who live in other villages, transport between the villages and Tsumkwe School for learners attending there, and transport for the teachers to come back and forth between the villages and Tsumkwe.

Transport between the Village Schools

The Village Schools are strategically placed in each "quadrant" of the Conservancy, so in addition to the villages that have the schools themselves, many villages have a school within a few kilometers. In some cases, the villages are close enough to the school that children could just walk – and sometimes they do this. However parents express concern about animals, especially elephants and lions, if their children must walk through the bush to and from school regularly. The Donkey-cart Transportation Scheme (DOTS) was the first effort to provide transport for these students; this will be discussed below.

Transport for Tsumkwe School learners

Transport has usually been provided for students from Grade 4 and up, to get to Tsumkwe school at the start of each new term (there are three terms per year, separated by vacations of several weeks each). When I was there in 2001–2002, it was the Village Schools Coordinator who organized this transportation with funding from NNDFN. For several years, NAMAS has coordinated with the Ministry of Education to provide transport for children to and from the school at the beginning and end of each school term. Although this service is appreciated, it is not often enough for many of the learners, who get homesick and desire to visit more frequently than three times per year (this is especially true for younger learners). In 2010, many villages requested that transport should be extended to include "home weekends," long weekends which occur once a month (Hays et al. 2010). Currently, learners

often choose to take an available lift to their home village for the weekend. If there is no transport back they often stay too long in their village and miss days of school.

As described in the previous chapter, the teachers also experience problems with transport. If they need to come into Tsumkwe for any reason – to access the CLDC, to get their paychecks (or to sort out problems regarding lack of pay), to do their shopping or to visit friends and relatives on the weekend, they struggle to get back to their villages. This leads to teacher absenteeism, which is considered problematic by other stakeholders even when teachers have a legitimate reason. Furthermore, the Village Schools Principal lacks adequate transport to perform his tasks (See Chapter 7).

The Donkey-cart Transportation Scheme

A solution for transportation was included in the initial project design. In 1993 and 1994, the Donkey-cart Transportation Scheme (DOTS)⁴ was developed with the intention that communities could take charge of their own transport to and from schools. The donkeys and carts were meant to be a communal responsibility, but eventually this project came to a halt as care for the donkeys and maintenance of the carts declined. By 2001, the image of the abandoned donkey cart in the bush seemed to symbolize the failure of things to “work” in the Nyae Nyae area. Several reasons have been suggested for failure of DOTS; exploring the program and the various explanations for its breakdown provide some insight into the complexity that can emerge from seemingly simple solutions.

In her evaluation of the VSP in 1993 – as DOTS was in the early stages of design and implementation – Bieseke recognized two potential pitfalls that required careful consideration. First, she noted that the use and care of donkeys had no cultural precedent among the Ju!’hoansi: “The care, feeding, watering, harnessing, protecting and general use of donkeys each have associated social problems, the solution to none of which lies in the repertoire of Nyae Nyae Ju!’hoansi at present” (1993a:10). In addition, she also noted that the process of purchasing, transporting, and distributing the donkeys was a complicated endeavor that had not been negotiated by the Ju!’hoansi themselves. Thus, from the beginning that aspect of the project could not be under their control (*ibid.*; this was expressed in the 1993 VSP Annual Report).

The material for the construction of the donkey carts was delivered to Baraka, where technical trainees constructed carts as part of their training. By the end of 1994, 48 donkeys and five carts had been allocated to the communities that were in need the most (Brörmann 1994). The communities signed contracts with the Village Schools Project, clarifying the

⁴ Funded by the American Embassy Special Self-Help Fund.

responsibilities on each side and stating that the carts were to be used only for the purposes of transportation to and from the Village Schools for students living elsewhere.

A Namibian development worker who had been employed in Nyae Nyae during the early 1990s told me in 2002 that the carts had been designed in such a way that they were too heavy for the donkeys, and thus did not function properly, resulting in frustration on the part of the communities. There were other frustrations too. Community members themselves told me, in interviews in 2001 and 2002, that the problem was that the carts were only meant to be used for transport to and from the Village Schools for learners from other villages, and communities are equally concerned with transport to and from Tsumkwe School. In addition, community members said that they need transport to and from Tsumkwe for other reasons that they consider to be important. As a result conflicts arose over appropriate use of the carts. They also said that the donkeys escaped and were eaten by wild animals. Later, Bieseles suggested that, as property ownership among the Ju/'hoansi is individual and not communal, no one took responsibility for either the carts or the donkeys, with the result that broken carts were not repaired and donkeys that ran away were not retrieved (personal communication, August 2001). None of these explanations excludes the others, and probably all contributed to the ultimate abandonment of the donkey carts as a form of transportation to the schools. The idea was tried again with support from NAMAS after they began in 2004, but similar problems occurred.

Bieseles's consultancy report comments on the complexities of the issue of transportation and what it meant for community control. She also predicted some of the problems that arose with the donkey carts, and issues that continue to center on transportation:

[I]t is unrealistic to assume that either Western moral standards about community sharing or distribution, or indeed Western/Christian notions of the rewards for labor or the value of selflessness will necessarily prevail in an indigenous society like the Ju/'hoansi just because they have a "cooperative" [the NNFC] and are "modernizing." Neither should ... an egalitarian society such as that of the Ju/'hoansi ... be romanticized as being in a state of "primitive communism" where no problems of laziness or selfishness can occur. Ju/'hoansi need mentoring help in the organizational aspects of something as complex as the provision of school transport, though it is of course necessary to involve the commitment of the entire community to their own schools and schooling. [1993a:9]

Use of vehicles

Transportation itself may not seem to be the most serious problem that the Ju/'hoansi face in education, and it is certainly not the most fundamental, but it is a major practical problem and examining it closely serves to highlight some key underlying issues. One is the perspec-

tive among many Jul'hoansi that education – and access to it in the form of transportation – is something that outsiders, including government and international donors, are responsible for providing for them. This is not surprising considering how hard outsiders have worked to convince the Jul'hoansi to go to school, and the relative frequency with which people come around asking about it.⁵ Furthermore, there clearly is money available for transportation, somewhere – as is evidenced by the fact that government officials, researchers, development workers and others come to the area in four-wheel drive vehicles to ask them, or inform them, about their schools. It is not hard to understand why one of the most adamant requests of Nyae Nyae village residents is for vehicles at their disposal to transport the children.

As will be discussed in the following chapters, people at Nyae Nyae have been requesting an expansion of the Jul'hoansi schooling beyond what is currently available to them in their villages – for more schools, and to higher grades than the current three. This matches the original spirit of the project, and is sound pedagogical reasoning. In the absence of this option, however, they are asking for help with transportation to the schools that outsiders are insisting that they attend, and in which they see the need to participate. Both of these requests have been consistently dismissed in decision-making processes (see Chapter 10). In the absence of reliable transportation, both learners and teachers rely on lifts to get where they need to go. Lifts are unreliable, inconsistent and unequal; furthermore, the informality of this arrangement leaves drivers – especially if they are community members⁶ – in a position where they are vulnerable to intense criticism for refusing lifts. For outsiders working with the community, refusal to give lifts can result in resentment and non-cooperation from the community. For Jul'hoan drivers it can be virtually impossible, socially, to turn down requests for lifts, especially from family. People usually avoid such social strain wherever possible, sometimes resulting in the “misuse” of vehicles.

In the absence of regular transportation, there has at times been resentment about the fact that vehicles used by development workers involved with the project were not used to help transport the children to and from school. Although people may have understood in principle that the VSP or NAMAS vehicles are not meant to be used for learner transport, and that this is not a part of the individual's job description, community members do not always agree with this arrangement and may blame the individual if he or she refuses their request for a ride. This issue has implications not only for the immediate concern of getting learners to and from the school they are supposed to be at, but also for the success of efforts

⁵ I count myself among these.

⁶ Some Jul'hoansi work as drivers for the Conservancy or the TA, as tour guides, or for a handful of other organizations, and make regular trips between Tsumkwe and the villages for their work.

at community consultation. Community members have frequently complained to me over the years that many people have asked them about their educational needs, and that each time they say their greatest need is transportation. In 2002, at the time of the quote opening this chapter, the fact that this demand seemed to go unheard was contributing to a general distrust of the Conservancy and Village Schools leadership in Baraka.

Vehicles are scarce resources in the Nyae Nyae area, and available vehicles have a history of being used as “taxis” – general transportation for anyone rather than only the specific purposes for which they were intended. Various transportation schemes, including a number of vehicles in the early years and the DOTs donkeys and carts, have resulted in the misuse – and often the destruction – of vehicles, abuse of the animals, and a general lack of maintenance of the equipment. These dynamics are so well known that when transportation arises as an issue of importance expressed by the community, there is a tendency by outsiders to automatically discount it as yet another attempt to gain access to vehicles, which will ultimately be misused. The request for transportation is frequently dismissed as being either unrealistic or manipulative.

Haikera, the former Village Schools principal, has a long-term perspective on the problem, and identified transportation as a key issue that has existed throughout the years. He summarized it at a workshop in 2010:

When I was the principal, the transport problem was partly addressed when we agreed on donkey carts for learner support between Tsumkwe and home villages during the holidays and home weekends – but the problem was maintaining those. What I see now is the routine visit of the principal and teacher advisor, and learners benefit from that [to get lifts], but there is no specific learner transportation any more. This is an issue that has been there all along, and it needs to be looked at critically if we want to retain learners and teachers. [11 October 2010]

Based on feedback from the community, the NAMAS evaluation report concluded that regular transportation service would lessen anxiety about the attendance of teachers, and about the ability of learners to return home to their villages more regularly than school holidays three times a year. Drawing on Le Roux’s long-term experience in development work in San communities in Botswana, the report suggested some possible alternatives including purchasing a vehicle and hiring a driver with the specific job of transporting the principal, teachers, and learners for clearly defined purposes, and providing support to village entrepreneurs to get a taxi license and start an income generating activity that could help villages with (paid) transport. Such initiatives would require support such as driving lessons, help with applications for small business support and help administering income, in order to pay back loans on vehicles.



Fig. 32: The ||Xa|oba Village School, with teacher Cwi Debe and his class in 2011

Alternatively, the report suggests, a similar approach could be tried with donkey carts. Although the donkey cart program appears to have failed both times that it was tried in the past, there were specific problems both times that could be addressed. The report suggests that design flaws could be improved upon. The problems that Bieseke recognized early on, such a lack of tradition of caring for animals or equipment and a lack of ownership of the carts and donkeys could be addressed by re-conceptualizing the project as a small business to support (rather than a communally-owned project requiring a donation). Support for transportation as a small business, either with donkey carts or vehicles, would allow for individuals who wished to undertake this responsibility to self-identify and to gain marketable skills, while providing a needed service. It would also be a step away from the problem of dependency, which is so clearly highlighted at all levels through the issue of transportation (Hays et al. 2010:50).

None of the solutions mentioned above would be problem-free; neither will finding a solution to the issue of transportation solve many of the deeper problems described in this book. However, like the other logistical barriers described in this chapter, it is not realistic to

expect either the Village Schools or the transition to Tsumkwe Primary School to function without addressing the problem of transportation. Achieving the goals of the project – both the original goals and the subsequent reformulations by NAMAS – would require finding a sustainable way to facilitate movement of teachers and learners between the schools they are supposed to be at, when they are supposed to be there.

Accommodation

Accommodating students who are going to school away from their home villages is in one sense a logistical problem – learners must have a place to sleep, appropriate clothes for the season, and enough food to eat. At the same time, it is profoundly social – being a part of a kin network entails both social acceptance, and a share of the food in the household; children grow up with this environment of unconditional acceptance and sharing. The hostel as it is currently designed cannot substitute for the comfort, safety and warmth of their family group. Accommodation issues related to the Village Schools affect students in three general categories: those attending the Village Schools but whose families are not living at that village; students from the villages who are attending Tsumkwe and staying at the hostel, and those attending Tsumkwe but staying with relatives in town.

Accommodation at the Village Schools

Six Village Schools are meant to serve the some 35 Nyae Nyae Villages. To attend school, children from the villages without a school need accommodation in a village with one. Although the villages are all Ju|'hoansi, they are not all related to one another; they are loosely grouped in “quadrants” and more closely related villages are closer together. This does not necessarily mean that the students have relatives in the nearest village with a school (nor that they do not have relatives at schools further away – in such cases they would be more likely to attend the further schools). Usually (though not always), most of the students at any Village School are kids who live in that village, or have very close relatives there and who will take the children into their homes and share food with them. For children from other villages who do not have kin to stay with when they come to the Village Schools, hostel-like arrangements are made, either in the school building (as was the case in Den|ui in 2014) or in some cases with the teacher (as in ||Xa|oba in 2010). In such cases, the teacher takes on additional responsibilities, including acting as a caretaker for students from other villages who are attending the school. While sometimes this arrangement works, it can become problematic. In a few cases, I have heard of feuds between neighboring villages that create hard feelings, and children do not feel welcome in the village with the school, even though

it may be close by. Very often there is a problem relating to food supply, and the learners return home because they do not have enough to eat.

The Tsumkwe hostel

The most obviously problematic situation is with the hostels in Tsumkwe; bad conditions there have been cited to me consistently since 2000, and are part of a complex of problems at the Tsumskwe schools, which are noted throughout this book. Heckler highlights the physical and emotional discomfort that San children have expressed to her and that she has witnessed over the years:

The younger Ju'hoan children miss their families. In the winter cold, without warm clothing, Ju'hoan children shiver, and while in the village they can sit by the fire and sleep close together for warmth, no such amenities exist for them in Tsumkwe hostel ... There is rarely enough nutritious food for them to eat or a warm, caring adult relative to lean against for warmth. [2011:4]

Heckler's contrast of the situation at the hostel with that of the village reflects both the relative physical comfort of their homes and the strong social bonds between the children and their kin in the villages. Those who have spent time in Ju'hoansi villages can't help but notice the constancy of physical contact between individuals; relatives and friends of various ages sit close together with legs or arms touching, and sleep cuddled together sharing blankets (which, Heckler points out, they are not allowed to do in the hostels). The cold bare hostel environment is particularly forbidding during the winter months⁷ that begin in the middle of the school year. Long chilly nights spent alone under a blanket and morning washes with cold water cause many of the children who have managed to stay that long to leave Tsumkwe and return to their villages.

At the hostel they are supposed to receive food. However, food availability is sometimes a problem, and if there is not enough at the hostel or the school (or if they are not able to access it because their plates and utensils were stolen, for example), learners return home. In the villages, the availability of food depends on the season, but it is generally considered by Ju'hoansi to be more secure, for two main reasons. One is that (if you know how to get it from the bush) food is all around in the villages – while in Tsumkwe town, where the bush food has been depleted, one is dependent on others, or on access to cash, in order to get what one needs. The other reason is that in the villages “people will share with you” (see Hays and Ninkova forthcoming; Lee 2013). Not having enough food at the hostel or school was often cited as a reason students leave Tsumkwe.

⁷ June and July are usually the coldest months.

Staying with relatives in Tsumkwe

If students have the option to stay with close kin who live in Tsumkwe, they generally strongly prefer this to living in the hostel – but again the critical factor is whether or not there is enough food at a household. In 2010, Hays, Hopson and le Roux found that staying with a relative who was working in Tsumkwe was the strongest determining factor to their staying in school; those who are employed are able to afford food for a household. Likewise, students who had dropped out frequently attributed this to problems at the household where they were staying; if the relative was not working they might not have food; and shelters in the squatter settlements become very wet in the rainy season. In such cases, students who have the option of returning to their villages usually do.

Food

At a meeting of the Nyae Nyae Conservancy Board in February 2002, a graph illustrating the numbers of students in the Village Schools over the previous six years (since 1996) was displayed and discussed. The numbers for the beginning of the 2002 school year were lower than in any of the preceding five years:

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Number of learners	184	163	193	147	123	79

In fact, it appeared as if there had been a peak Village School attendance in 1999, followed by a downward trend for three years. Initially, these numbers were taken to reflect a failure on the part of the Village Schools to attract and retain learners. It looked as though the schools had drawn many learners during the early years, when people were enthusiastic about their new mother-tongue education project and interest was high, but then children and communities began to lose interest as the years went by. Were they disappointed in the outcomes? Was there some other problem with the schools? Were they unhappy with the teachers? The discussion, led by the Village Schools Coordinator, focused on such possibilities in an effort to determine why children’s attendance at the Village Schools had been dropping so steadily, and also to clarify the “roles and responsibilities” of different community members, including parents, teachers, principals, and learners.

As the meeting was coming to a close, Andreas, a Conservancy board member, made an important observation. Andreas was not a School Committee member, and was not required to be at the meeting. But he had been working as a driver in Nyae Nyae for a number of years and knew the dynamics of the conservancy very well; he also cared very much about education and came to the meeting out of interest and concern. Andreas pointed out that

the number of learners at the Village Schools corresponded with the movements of the people between the villages and the central town of Tsumkwe. He said that

[f]rom 1997–1999, there was drought relief food contributed to the villages, and people stayed there because they had food. So there were more children in the schools. Since 2000 there has not been drought relief food, and more people are going to Tsumkwe looking for food – so there are less children at the schools. [Village School Committee meeting, 27 February 2002]

Because of the additional food security provided by government rations in the late 1990s, many people stayed in their *n!oresi*, or even returned there from Tsumkwe, leading to higher populations in the villages with a Village School, and the surrounding “feeder villages.” Starting in 1999, however, the provision of drought relief food ceased, and a lack of food security in the villages had caused a gradual migration away from the villages and to Tsumkwe town; this resulted in lower numbers of students at the Village Schools.

Transportation may prevent people from being where they want to be, but both learners and other community members will prioritize food over all other activities when it is scarce. This means that learners will leave school – either the Village Schools, or Tsumkwe school – if the food is not sufficient (or if they are unable to get enough because they don’t have plates and bowls, or for other reasons). It also means that other community members will consume school food if there is not enough other food in the village. No education effort in the region will be sustainable or successful unless food security for the community is integrated into project design.

Food in the villages

The Village Schools receive large bags of maize meal as a part of the School Feeding Program; at various points different support bodies have taken on the responsibility of providing or supplementing this (including NNDNF, the Namibian government, and NAMAS). Normally, the food is delivered at the beginning of each term, and supposed to be enough for all of the learners in the school to eat two meals a day for that entire term.

The food delivered is not always enough. During the time of our evaluation of the NAMAS project, as noted above, food was a serious problem. Reports from villages suggested that the amount of food delivered to the schools was not sufficient and that the lack of food affected learners’ ability to concentrate at school, and led to them dropping out. The principal made efforts to address this, as described in the previous chapter, but it continued at least into the second term. The following two excerpts from letters written by Village Schools teachers to the Regional Education Office describe the problems from the perspective of the teachers:

This school did not receive any maize meal since March 11, 2010. The children were suffering of hunger and had difficulties of attending. Therefore I postponed the observation [by the principal] until next term, so that I can have a good and successful teaching together with learners learning. [From the teacher in Baraka, dated 13 April 2010]

In Denlui most learners are from surrounding villages and they stay in a classroom as a small hostel. The learners are fed from the school feeding program. Even so, in the village there is hunger. Hunting is not successful these days and the villagers have nothing to eat. Learners are struggling since the maize meal was finished on the 6th of the month. Since then, nothing was provided and the children have to come to school without having anything to eat. This makes teaching and learning difficult as learners come and just sleep in class because they are weak. It also affects our studies since we are student teachers. [From the teachers in Denlui, not dated, but also during the first school term in 2010]

The second letter addresses the general problem of food shortage in the villages – when there is no food for the Village Schools, the students who are boarding from other villages become extra mouths for the village to feed. It is generally true that people in the Tsumkwe district do not have enough access to food, especially during certain seasons when bush food is scarce (such as the late part of the rainy season, which coincided with the shortage of school food in the case above). People in the villages are sometimes criticized by outsiders for eating the school food, or for giving too much food to the learners. In such a situation, however, it would be unrealistic to expect people not to eat the food earmarked for the school – they are very, very hungry.

At times there is enough food; as has been noted already, people often say that they have better access to food in the villages than in Tsumkwe (especially if they do not have money). In seasons of plentiful bush food and when the government food rations are delivered regularly (these can also be irregular), the school food is said to be “enough.” Even in these times, however, the use and sharing of food is a deep cultural value. The teachers have on occasions been given the responsibility for rationing the school food – which puts them in a very difficult position. Conflicts involving the school food, how much there is, who has access to it, and who makes decisions about its distribution emerge regularly in discussions about the Village Schools – as they did at the conference described at the beginning of the chapter, and in subsequent village visits that same month.

Food in Tsumkwe

Not getting enough food at TPS has consistently been high on the list of reasons why learners leave school (see the following chapter). Another issue is the quality of the food; at various points over the years learners have complained about receiving food that is rotten. One

particularly striking complaint in 2010 were the multiple reports that the large iron cooking pots in which the school food was prepared were left out overnight, and that people had defecated in them. Obviously when learners heard this they no longer wanted to eat the food cooked in those pots. Jul'hoan students also frequently report that their dishes are stolen, and so they were not able to get in line for the food; they had to wait for others to finish to borrow their utensils – but by then the food was finished. Another problem for learners living in Tsumkwe was the inability of learners who were not living at the hostel to access the same food support as hostel dwellers. Because of other problems at the hostel, and the desire to live with relatives, some learners were living with family members who may or may not have had some income, but usually had limited supplies of food themselves.

Bush food

Hunting and gathering bush food is an important part of Jul'hoan identity and something people say that they very much enjoy doing. In addition, people clearly say that they depend on bush food for their survival. In cases where government rations (including school food) either do not arrive, or are used up before the next supply comes, people will go out in the bush looking for food, often taking their hungry children with them. As with the expectation that people not eat the maize meal when there is no other food in the village, it would be unrealistic to expect them in these circumstances to prioritize school over their search for food. This is so obvious that it should not need stating, but is consistently underestimated in planning processes, and in interpretations of the situation and the choices that children and their families are making.

Heckler describes these gathering trips as a “bush school” – the kids who follow their parents out into the bush are gaining valuable skills that they will need to survive in the area (2013). Considering the dearth of other reliable economic opportunities available to them, as noted elsewhere in this book, dependence on such skills for getting food for themselves is one of the most valuable skills that these children can learn. Parents are often told that that they should leave their children behind when they go on these trips. This advice is not always – or even usually – heeded, and for good reason. In Chapter 10 I will return to this in the discussion about community involvement in the Village Schools.

Komtsa's story

The following story comes from a focus group interview that I conducted with a group of young men in ǀXaloba in 2011, for the regional survey conducted by LAC (Dieckmann et al. 2014). I had asked the youth to describe to me their experiences transitioning from the

Village School in ||Xa|oba to Tsumkwe Primary School. Together, their stories illustrate the number of structural barriers these young men had contended with before finally deciding to leave school, and they are a testament to the perseverance and resilience of the Ju|'hoansi youth today in the face of numerous hardships (described in Chapter 9). The story of one man in particular, Komtsa, typified the numerous interconnected logistical barriers that Ju|'hoan youth face when they transition to Tsumkwe – shortage of food, lack of transport, problems with accommodation, and general lack of financial support. Komtsa's story includes his brother ‡Oma who was out hunting during the interview.

Komtsa is a young man of 23 from ||Xa|oba. He completed Grades 1–3 at the Village School and then entered Grade 4 in Tsumkwe. Soon after starting that year, however, he left Tsumkwe with his brother ‡Oma,⁸ and they went to Aasvoëlsnes with the intention of completing Grades 4 and 5 there. However, there was a shortage of food at the Aasvoëlsnes school, and since the brothers did not have relatives in that village, there was no one to help them. Every day they were hungry, and they would go to the veld to gather food but it was not enough. The principal said they should go home, and that they could come back when there was more food at the school. They returned home, but it proved difficult to get back to Aasvoëlsnes. When they went into Tsumkwe to try to find a lift, they got hungry while waiting and they just went home to ||Xa|oba. “When you are home, your parents will share with you; other people will not share so it is better to stay with your parents,” said Komtsa. They did not return to Aasvoëlsnes that year.

In 2007, Komtsa and |Ui, another boy from ||Xa|oba, went back to Tsumkwe to try to enter Grade 5. They stayed with |Ui's father in one of the informal settlements in Tsumkwe, but the older man was not working and did not have money to support them. It was cold in winter and they had no blankets and were not living in a good place. They struggled on, trying to remain in school. Then it rained, and their papers (school reports, identity cards, medical cards and other documents) got wet and damaged.⁹ But Komtsa said that the school reports and papers were not really the main problem; the problem was hunger. They were eating rotten maize-meal in Tsumkwe because they simply had nothing else. “That is when we said ‘No, we can't live like that,’ and we left and came back to ||Xa|oba.” [Hays et al. 2014:121–122]¹⁰

Komtsa's story, like that of many Ju|'hoan youth, is remarkable not only for the numerous obstacles he had to confront; it shows how hard he and his companions tried to keep go-

⁸ He did not specifically state why they left Tsumkwe that time, but gave the reasons below for why he left the following year. He also actively participated in a discussion about teachers and the principal abusing Ju|'hoan students.

⁹ Documents getting damaged in the rainy season is a common, and often very problematic occurrence for many Ju|'hoansi.

¹⁰ The two paragraphs are reproduced with slight changes from the section on Nyae Nyae in the 2014 report on the status of the San in Namibia called *Scraping the Pot* (Dieckmann et al. 2014).

ing forward in school, despite the difficulties they encountered at every turn. In the end, however, most youth – like Komtsa, his brother ‡Oma and his friend |Ui – decide that the effort is just too much and they return to their villages, where they know they will find food and acceptance. They may also find better opportunities to build a sustainable career. At the time of the interview in 2011, Komtsa was working at the Living Hunters Museum, a village-initiated and run community tourism project in ||Xa|oba. He listed other activities that he engages in, such as health training workshops and traditional hunting (with a bow and arrow). He also spoke about possibilities that he sees for his future, including translation and working in tourism. He expressed a desire to stay and work in his own village – an option that is especially attractive in ||Xa|oba because of the existence of the Living Hunters Museum, as well as the Village School. We will return to Komtsa in the Conclusion of this book. The following chapter explores in greater detail the problems that Village Schools students encounter when they transfer to the primary school in Tsumkwe.

9 Every year there are problems: transition to the government schools

We try hard to give children education ... We need our children to go to school, we need them to help us. We try hard, and it makes us sad. Every year we send our children [to Tsumkwe school], and there are always problems.

[Ju'hoan mother at Den\ui, *Fieldnotes*, February 6, 2002]

I am happy that we have a Village School, and a school building, I am glad that it is there, and that the kids have a place to go to school. But what I am not happy about – why is it always a problem in the other schools after grade three?

[*Village Schools committee member, Fieldnotes February 2002*]

Village Schools Objective 5: To enable Ju'hoan children to join government schools in Grade 4 as confident and critically thinking learners

While the first four of the cardinal objectives listed in Chapter 5 focus on incorporating the language, knowledge, values, and skills of the community into an education program that is located close to the home villages of the children, the fifth objective of the Village Schools Project focuses on the transfer to the Tsumkwe school in Grade 4. The goal of having more Village Schools learners successfully transition to the schools in Tsumkwe has remained central to educational efforts in the region. In a 2009 NAMAS report, for example, two of the goals (among others), listed under the main heading *Improve provision of quality education*, were achieving a higher percentage of village school learners who continue their education after Grade 3, and increased number of San learners completing Grades 10 and 12 (NAMAS 2009).

At the time of my extended visit in 2002, children who had three years of mother-tongue education at the Village Schools seemed *less* likely to continue in school after transitioning there in Grade 4 than were those students who began their education at government schools from Grade 1. There are many possible explanations for this. For example, children whose first experience is within a secure environment close to their families and in their own language may be less willing to tolerate the environment of Tsumkwe school, with its reputation for bullying, stealing, physical and verbal abuse, and so on, while those who begin there “get used to it” (although even those who begin in Grade 1 there seldom stay for longer than a few years). Another explanation is that children who begin Grade 1 at TJSS are likely to have close family members in Tsumkwe town whom they live with, whereas the children who began in the Village Schools may very well be living in the hostel and have little or no

local support. In addition, those who live in Tsumkwe have more exposure to English, and adapting to education in that language is much easier than for those who live in the villages, where almost all of the conversation they are exposed to is in Ju!hoansi.

From the perspective of many outsiders, including those in government and donors, this lack of successful transition has at times seemed to indicate that the project was failing. One report called the high dropout rate of VSP learners from the school in Tsumkwe an “indicator for an acute crisis” (Pfaffe 2001:14). This problem was often blamed on the VSP teachers, whose “frequent absenteeism” caused the children to internalize “the indifferent attitude towards education that they have been experiencing throughout their day-to-day village life” (ibid.). This attitude was echoed ten years later by the Tsumkwe Primary School Principal, as described in Chapter 3.

Both Pfaffe and the Tsumkwe school principal make a very important point: the culture of the home, and attitudes towards schooling, will profoundly impact on children’s response to the government schools. To saddle the teachers entirely with this blame overlooks the fact that they, too, are products of a home life in which an attitude towards formal education is, understandably, ambiguous; they have to negotiate this difference. The experience of the Nyae Nyae Ju!hoansi with formal education is both recent and problematic; there is thus no real precedent for a positive relationship with the government schools. There are a host of ways in which the government school is a forbidding environment to Ju!hoan children and adults. To expect the teachers to be a one-generation bridge for this enormous gap is unrealistic – in particular if the problems at the Tsumkwe schools are not addressed and the VS teachers are not supported by teachers and administrators at the Tsumkwe schools. The sections below will examine the various transitions that the Ju!hoan community is being expected to make – many of which are symbolized by the transitioning of the children from the Village Schools to the Tsumkwe schools.

Original objectives

One problematic area for the Ju!hoan teachers has been negotiating the difference between cultural approaches to education in their home communities, and what students will be expected to adapt to in the government school at Tsumkwe (or elsewhere); this distinction is highlighted by the examples above. According to the original objectives, the holistic approach of the Ju!hoan community to teaching was to be integrated into the curriculum. The goal of transition to the government schools was present in the original design of the project, and originally the relationship was envisioned as potentially reciprocal, as described in the statement prepared for the inauguration of the Village Schools:

The Ministry of Education and Culture has already incorporated the Village Schools Project into the national Basic Education Reform Program. Information is constantly being exchanged in order to create a forum for fruitful exchange of ideas that ultimately will benefit the whole nation in the striving for a relevant primary school curriculum. [NNDNFN 1994:3]

The idea that the approach of the Village Schools model might have something to offer the new nation's general approach to education was very popular early in the project. However, the transition of Village Schools students to the mainstream government schools quickly became the dominant focus.¹ This point deserves careful examination for a few reasons. First, it is largely on this point that the success of the Village Schools Project is evaluated, and often called into question. In 2001 and in 2011, the principals of the Tsumkwe Schools (and others) both criticized the Village Schools and its teachers on the grounds that children who come from the Village Schools were less successful in the government school than those who began there in Grade 1. Secondly, even under the best of circumstances, achieving the twin goals of providing children with education that closely matches their home culture as well as preparing them to enter into a system that is fundamentally at odds with that culture would be an enormous challenge. Considering the extremely problematic environment at Tsumkwe School – as will be discussed in this chapter – one might say that these goals are entirely incongruent.

Importantly, the communities' complaints over the years, both children and adults, have *not* primarily been about the Village Schools; they are mostly about the government school. The emphasis on the transition to government school as the measure of success of the project, without attention to a series of other problems and the depth of the transition involved, has affected the general evaluation of the project and its core problems. The remainder of this chapter will provide an overview of some of the issues involved with transition from the Village Schools to Tsumkwe School. Students give very many reasons for dropping out, mostly having to do with the social or physical environment of Tsumkwe and the school. Some of these reasons had to do with specific incidents or dynamics at a particular time, sometimes involving individuals, but most are remarkably consistent over the years.

¹ I do not have solid information as to why the interest of the government waned, but often such changes in focus are due to a change in positions of key individuals who inspired or led an initiative, unforeseen complications arising in the process of implementation, or a need to conform to strict policies and curriculum guidelines that leave little room for special approaches.

“Every year there are problems”

Interviews with students and parents over the past 15 years have yielded a long list of reasons for dropping out of the government school in Tsumkwe. A number of the reasons have to do with how they are treated at the school and at the hostel if they stay there. Harassment by other learners, usually (but not always) from other ethnic groups, is frequently reported; this includes name-calling and teasing, physical abuse, theft, and destruction of property. Some of this is most certainly ethnically motivated; the San are heavily stigmatized across the region and students repeatedly report being harassed because of who they are (Le Roux 1999; Suzman 2001; Dieckmann et al. 2014). Complaints of being beaten or otherwise punished by teachers or the principal are regular – usually for being absent, late, or not having homework done. Ju!’hoan students often claim that they were “kicked out” of school for various reasons, such as returning late to the hostel, or for smoking. Sometimes, there is not enough equipment at the school or the hostel; over the years many learners have cited a lack of beds or blankets at the hostel, or a lack of chairs in the classroom, as their reason for dropping out.

Food is very often the central determinant of individual choices, as described in the previous chapter; not having enough food at the hostel or school was often cited as a reason that students leave the school in Tsumkwe and return to their villages. A number of other reasons relate to poverty. A lack of adequate clothes, shoes, toiletries or other necessary personal items causes the learners to feel uncomfortable and shy around other students (this is also a reason for other students bullying them). Ju!’hoan students have told me that they dropped out of school because of a lack of school books, exercise books, pencils, and other necessities. Some complained that they were required to cover their books, but that they did not have access to paper or to money to buy book covers; they got in trouble for that, so they left. Lack of transport is another frequently-cited educational obstacle; students who take the opportunity to return home for a weekend were unable to return to school in time; or in some cases they were unable to get transport home regularly so they finally just went home and stayed.

Social reasons can cause students to leave school. Students who do not have siblings or other relatives at the school will generally not stay there alone; this is especially the case for students from small villages with few learners at TJSS, or for girls (who are usually in the minority in a group transferring to the government school); such students reported that they felt lonely and vulnerable at TJSS, so they left. Illness, or the death of a family member, may cause students to miss a substantial portion of school, after which they may not be allowed to return. Some students drop out because they got married (or became pregnant). This is often cited as a reason for girls; but young men also gave marriage as a reason for

dropping out. This is connected with a general problem with age – students who are too old, or who assume adult roles (like marriage and parenthood) are no longer allowed to attend the primary school.

Sometimes, specific incidents resulted in the mass departure of many students from the school. In 2002, there was an accusation of witchcraft at the school, and all the learners from the Village Schools who had just begun at Tsumkwe returned to their villages, terrified. However not all students give an elaborate reason for leaving; some simply say that they didn't want to be in Tsumkwe, they wanted to stay in their village; "no other reason."

||Xa|oba cases

In November 2011, I interviewed a group of youth in the village of ||Xa|oba, which has a village school. The young men had all attended the Village School for three years, and then went to Tsumkwe for varying lengths of time. Their stories, just a few of the many that I have heard over the years, bring to life the list of reasons given above and I will briefly present them here.

||Naq'u (15) finished Grade 4 in Tsumkwe and then went to Grade 5, but left this year (2011) because of hunger. He did not stay in the hostel, so he did not get food. The other kids beat him and they stole things from him – he reported it to the teachers, but they did not do anything.



Fig. 33: Group of youth from ||Xa|oba, interviewed in 2011

|Kunta (17) dropped out of Grade 8 this year (2011) because there were not enough chairs, and he had to sit on the floor. He was staying with his parents in Tsumkwe but they were not working and there was not enough food at home. Once, he could not do his homework, and the teacher beat him. He came back to ||Xa|oba to stay with his aunt, and he goes out hunting and gathering often.

Dam (16) is the son of a former VS teacher, who is currently a literacy promoter. He attended the village schools and went to Tsumkwe in Grade 4 but was living with relatives in a house that leaked when it rained. His clothes got wet during a period of heavy rain and he did not have anything to wear to school, and so he did not go. The teacher then beat him because he was absent, and so he left.

|Kaece (13) dropped out of Grade 7 this year (2011). His cup and plate got “lost”, and without it he could not get in the food line at the school. When he asked some other kids where his cup and plate were, they beat him, so he returned to his village.

These boys were still young at the time of the interview, and all of them said they would try again. By 2014, however, the last time I visited, all of them had dropped out and were staying in the village.

The problems highlighted by these cases are part of a consistent pattern that has, in many ways, remained the same since I began observing it in 2001. During the second half of that year, there were four Village Schools in operation. The school at ‡Aqbase was closed early in the year, when the village dispersed because of a lack of water. The majority of those students transferred to the Baraka Village School, with some going to Tsumkwe School. Although all four of the other schools were functioning, there were also periods of school closure for a variety of reasons, including illness on the part of teachers, problems with water and/or delivery of school food, misplacement of school keys after breaks, and (especially in ||Auru) problems with elephants. Although many former Village Schools students had begun Grade 4 at TJSS at the beginning of the year, by the time I began my field research in June most of these had dropped out and returned to their villages. Some were attending the Village Schools again, saying they were in “Grade 4,” but most of these were aware that, as the schools technically stop at Grade 3, they would have to repeat Grade 4 at a government school the following year. Some of the Grade 4 students had also gone to the government school at Aasvoëlne (the closest government school after Tsumkwe) at the beginning of the year, but they also had left that government school; most of these students returned to Baraka, where there were several “Grade 4” and even “Grade 5” learners.

There were very few learners from any of the Village Schools who stayed at Tsumkwe in 2001. Although getting an exact number was difficult because attendance shifted,

by the third term of that year there were no more than two or three learners from any one school; for some schools, like Den|ui, there were none. This was often blamed on the teachers, but there was no clear correspondence between the functioning of a particular Village School and the likelihood that learners would succeed (or stay) at TJSS. For example, based upon my own observations at Den|ui school and conversations with others who visited the schools (such as the Village Schools Coordinator and the Tsumkwe school principal), that school was functioning well; teachers were present and enthusiastic, children attended and seemed interested, and parents did not report any problems with the school (other than an impending lack of school food). The principal of TJSS said that she considered it to be the best of all of the schools. By late October, however, all of the Grade 3 graduates from Den|ui who had gone on to Grade 4 at TJSS at the beginning of 2001 had dropped out.

A shift to Tsumkwe in 2002 – overcrowding

In the beginning of 2002, there were fewer students in the Village Schools than in any of the preceding five years. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the number of learners at the Village Schools corresponded with the movements of the people between the villages and Tsumkwe. During the years with high numbers of VSP learners (1996–1998), drought relief food was delivered to the villages, and many people stayed in their *n|loresi* (home villages), or even returned there from Tsumkwe. From 1999, a lack of food security in the villages had caused a gradual migration to Tsumkwe town.

In 2002, additional factors led to increased migration to Tsumkwe. Just before the beginning of the new school year, a woman was killed by an elephant in ||Auru. There were many strange circumstances surrounding this event, and people from that area were extremely frightened.² Most abandoned the area and moved to Tsumkwe. Although a few learners and one teacher remained in ||Auru, the functioning of the school was severely impaired. The school in ||Xa|oba had drastically reduced numbers – also due to shifts of villagers to Tsumkwe – and by late February, although the school was functioning, there were only a few learners there. The villages of Baraka and Den|ui, on the other hand, did not experience much of a migration, and the numbers of learners in these villages remained steady.

The drop in learners at the Village Schools corresponded with, and partially contributed to, drastically increased attendance at TJSS in the earlier grades. In addition to increased numbers due to migration, there were a great number of Grade 4 learners from the Village

² The story going around was that this elephant had killed the woman in such a specific and violent way that it was like a murder; some people speculated that the elephant had some relationship with the woman or was actually a dead relative of hers.

Schools who started at TJSS in 2002, including both those who were in Grade 3 the previous year or years, and also many that had been in Grades “4” or “5” at the Village Schools, having dropped out of Tsumkwe or Aasvoëlnes in previous years. As a result of these combined factors, at the beginning of the school year in 2002 there was an unprecedented number of Jul’hoan learners at TJSS. The hostel and classrooms were “over-full” (according to the principal), there was a lack of sufficient food, and the general environment was understandably chaotic. The Grade 4 students at TJSS were divided into two classes; but even so these classes were full beyond capacity. Students reported a lack of books and other supplies, including chairs and desks. This overcrowding affected not only classrooms, but living conditions as well. There were not enough beds or blankets for all of the students at the hostels, and some students had to sleep on the cold concrete floor. A lack of food was a major concern of students and parents in all the villages and Tsumkwe settlements.

By the second week of the 2002 school year, several problems were already brewing. Some Jul’hoan boys had been accused of breaking through the fence that surrounded the hostel – as mentioned in the story in Chapter 1. The principal was convinced that they were the culprits, and had kicked them out. The boys denied breaking the fence, and the parents and other Jul’hoan adults believed them. One prominent conservancy employee had taken a sharp knife and tried to cut the fence, but was unable, and asked how the boys could have done it when they did not even have such sharp knives. Many Jul’hoansi took this incidence as further evidence that the Jul’hoansi were being “pushed out” of the school, and Jul’hoan parents were expressing great frustration with their inability to understand or influence the problematic situation at the Tsumkwe school. In the midst of this growing tension, news of an incident involving the only Jul’hoan teacher in Tsumkwe, swept through the Conservancy.

Witchcraft

In the beginning of February 2002, the one Jul’hoan teacher at the government school in Tsumkwe, who was beginning his second year of teaching one of the Grade 1 classes there, became convinced that he was being bewitched by the principal of TJSS.³ The story spread

³ In Botswana, it is very common to hear stories about (or from) San learners who were doing well in school, but then were suddenly bewitched by members of other groups. This is much less common in Namibia; however there are a handful of Jul’hoansi individuals in the Nyae Nyae Conservancy who spent some years schooling across the border in Botswana and who told me that they had had such experiences. The teacher who felt that he had been bewitched by the principal had been in Botswana for most of his schooling. Many people in Namibia did take the story very seriously though – the Ministry of Education sent a small team to investigate the matter. Although the principal vociferously denied – and belittled – the charge, many thought it was possible that she wanted to at least appear to be invoking the power of witchcraft against this teacher – and

like a bushfire around the school and the town, and numerous stories about previous strange and frightening events at the school resurfaced and were connected with the principal. Over the next few days, a mass exodus of Ju'hoan pupils took place. Visits to numerous villages throughout February and March confirmed that most of the Grade 4 learners who began at TJSS in January had returned to their home villages, or to the settlements their families had begun just outside of Tsumkwe. The almost universal response of the students and the parents was that they had dropped out because of the witchcraft story – although other reasons for their return home were also given. By March, a few of these children had decided to return, but most stayed out of school.

When I asked what Ju'hoansi do if they are bewitched, one man told me that they could go to the traditional healers. He said that “[t]he ones who are trained, who know, can defend themselves and can fight against muti.⁴ Some of them, if they are trained and strong they can, but not all of them.” The other man present agreed with him. When I asked if their healing trance dances work against witchcraft, he said “[n]o, the Ju'hoansi don't know about those things, only the black people.⁵ The Ju'hoansi cannot bewitch. And they cannot protect themselves from muti” (Fieldnotes February 2002). Others gave similar responses. Although the inability of the Ju'hoansi to practice witchcraft was not spoken of with regret, feelings of vulnerability were clearly expressed; of having limited means through which to assert their own rights, or to protect themselves.

The fact that this discourse of witchcraft surfaced so strongly around the government school in Tsumkwe is indicative of a general feeling of alienation and impotency as regards formal education for their children. Repeated complaints about TJSS on the part of the community over the past few years had gone unheeded. During the weeks after the wave of dropouts in February, many parents were saying they would no longer encourage their children to go to school. At the same time, they recognized the need for their children to access school-based skills, and expressed great frustration at the fact that there were so many problems at Tsumkwe. Many parents expressed statements such as the one opening this chapter, and these below:

For my part I can say that I want kids to attend school, and the kids also want to. Now there is something that keeps kids away ... we [the parents] didn't see what is happening. Maybe the kids are telling the truth, or maybe they are only hearing sto-

against others; similar complaints had been made against her in the past.

⁴ Common to many Bantu languages and often translated as “medicine,” muti is also widely used to mean witchcraft.

⁵ The Ju'hoansi do not refer to themselves as “black.” In southern Africa, this term is used to refer to the descendants of Bantu-speaking groups (and other black Africans). San groups regularly distinguish themselves from this population.

ries. We don't really know what is happening. [Jul'hoan father at Makuri, Fieldnotes, February 2002]

We don't know who is on the School Committee in Tsumkwe, so we don't know who can help us. The kids are schooling nicely in the Village School, and when they transfer to Tsumkwe they just drop out – what is the problem? [Jul'hoan father at Denlui, Fieldnotes, March 2002]

Beatings

The use of physical discipline at schools has been illegal in Namibia since Independence. Nonetheless, there are regular reports that it happens; many teachers, especially those who were either trained with or who had experienced (as students) methods that rely on physical discipline, feel they cannot control children without using physical force. Both Bantu and European traditions include the use of “beatings” to discipline children. Although it is illegal in schools, it is not uncommon for parents from these cultures to use mild physical discipline as a part of their child-rearing approach. Their children, while they may dislike being hit, will have cultural exposure to it and will not usually see mild physical punishment as a reason to drop out of school.

Jul'hoansi, and other San communities – indeed, most parents from hunting and gathering communities, as described in Chapter 1 – generally do not hit children. For many San, this is a new experience when they begin attending government schools. Not surprisingly, one of the most consistent reasons that Jul'hoan children have given over the years for dropping out of Tsumkwe schools is “beating by the teachers” – for not doing their homework, being late or absent, getting answers wrong, not having a book cover, or misbehaving in some way. This complaint, which I heard frequently in 2001 and 2002, resurfaced during the NAMAS evaluation in 2010, during interviews for the national survey on San livelihoods in 2011, at the NAMAS conference in 2014 (see also the Afterword).

All youth from ||Xaloba described above (interviewed in 2011 for the survey) cited being beaten as one of the main reasons that they dropped out; one of the boys described being beaten with broomsticks. When I asked if they reported it to the principal, they all laughed and said, “he also beats us!” In 2010, I had asked the principal of Tsumkwe Primary School about beatings at the school, and his reply was: “it is against the law, it is not supposed to happen;” he said he did not know anything about it. However, that same year, in an interview with a Ministry of Education official, I had asked where parents should take complaints about problems their children were having at the Tsumkwe school. He answered: “... the immediate person should be the principal of the school. But sometimes you might find that parents do not feel empowered to go to principal – who might be [the one] accused of perpetuating the problem.” He suggested that they should go instead to the traditional

leaders, because then, “it will be taken up seriously, unlike when it is reported to the perceived perpetrators of the practice” (Interview July 2010). Both the Ju’hoansi students in 2011 and the Ministry official were referring to the same principal. Although the official was careful not to directly accuse the principal, the implication was that the principal was one of the people who was said to be hitting the children, and that as a result, he was not likely to take up the complaint.⁶

This interviewee also noted that “the upbringing style of the San is different from any other ethnic group – San children are not beaten,” implicitly acknowledging both the widespread cultural practice of physical discipline practiced by other Namibian cultures, and that this is a characteristic which makes the San, including the Ju’hoansi, different. This particular cultural difference is frequently noted by teachers, school officials, and others in southern Africa, and despite the fact that physical punishment at school is illegal, this different “upbringing style” is sometimes considered by others to be a problem in that it causes children to leave school.

In 2011, after having heard so many complaints, I asked the principal again about the issue of beating, noting that this was the reason why many of the children from the Village Schools had run away. He replied:

I am not sure about this, I don’t have specific reports. I do know that they are not used to being told ‘do this, do that’ and they don’t want to be treated like the others, they want to be treated special. If they don’t do their homework, they are supposed to get punished, but the Village Schools kids don’t like being punished. In the Village Schools, they get homework only once a month – here they get homework every day, and if they don’t do it they get punished. The Ju’hoansi kids don’t like this. [Interview, October 2011]

Here, the principal does not directly discuss physical punishment, instead implying that the Ju’hoan children are, in general, “undisciplined,” in the most basic sense of the word.

It is worth noting here that, in Ju’hoan culture, “most punishment takes place in conversations” (Wiessner 2005:121). Wiessner describes levels of verbal punishment ranging from humorous put-downs applied as “leveling mechanisms” to reduce self-aggrandizing behavior, to outright criticism – which can take increasingly harsh forms. In severe cases, the verbal confrontation can signal a desire for the offending person to move away from the group (which, Wiessner points out, can have serious material consequences). Thus at the school, in addition to actual physical beating, verbal reprimands that are understood as normal discipline by the teachers or principal may be perceived by the students as extremely

⁶ By the summer of 2014, that principal was fired following an investigation of accusations that he had beaten a student.

aggressive, and as indications that they should leave the school. Indeed, students who have dropped out often describe having been “chased away” from the school.

Relations between Village Schools and Tsumkwe schools

Early training of the Village Schools teachers emphasized the value of, and made efforts to build upon, traditional Ju|’hoan education and culture (Bieseke 1992; Brörmann 1991–1993). At the same time, comparable efforts were *not* made at TJSS to sensitize the teachers there to the different learning styles of the students, or to their culture in general, so that they could welcome the Grade 4 learners and make them feel comfortable at the school. Since the beginning of the Village Schools, the relationship with the Tsumkwe schools has been tenuous in all ways. There has been very little interaction between the teachers and principal of the Village Schools, and those of the Tsumkwe schools. Although the idea was to have Ju|’hoan teachers posted at TJSS on a yearly or rotational basis, this has only been practiced on a few occasions. As noted above, there was a Ju|’hoan teacher at Tsumkwe in 2001, but he left in 2002 and was not replaced. There has not been a Ju|’hoan teacher there for many years primarily because there are not enough teachers to rotate.



Fig. 34: Ju|’hoan boys attending Tsumkwe Primary School in 2010

The report for NAMAS in 2010 recommended recognizing professional competence in the Ju'hoansi language as a legitimate skill and developing a qualification developed for this skill, so that a qualified Ju'hoansi language expert could teach alongside a government-certified teacher, and their complementary skills could “enrich the teaching and learning experience” (Hays et al. 2010:62). The report also highlighted the need for more flexible options for the placement of San in teaching positions in government schools, including those who do not have official qualifications. Positions suggested included teacher aids and language teachers working together with “qualified” teachers, and recommended that the language skills and cultural knowledge of the Ju'hoan teachers be recognized alongside the teaching skills of the government-qualified teacher.

Although it was recognized from the beginning that these kinds of relationships among the different schools needed to be developed, the mechanisms through which this could happen were not put in place. Some who were involved in the early planning recognized this later:

Tsumkwe school, I would say that this was where insufficient attention was given. It was the responsibility of the Windhoek region officials and Ministry officials in the (then) directorate of Education Program Implementation. Despite good intentions and verbal reassurances at all levels, in retrospect all those officials and the staff of the school should have had very thorough practical and theoretical training in intercultural education. [Avenstrup, personal comment, 2008]

In general there is an urgent need for more – and much more effective – communication between the government schools and the Village Schools teachers, of the sort that Avenstrup described in the quote above. Cross communication between the government schools and the Village schools teachers should ultimately allow opportunities for teachers from both schools to exchange materials and ideas on innovative approaches to training for teachers of San children

Education – “Key to the future”?

Although Ju'hoan parents are often characterized as “not caring” about the education of their children, parents consistently affirm that they very much want their children to access the skills associated with schooling. Recent surveys have found that San communities recognize the advantages that formal education could provide, including greater economic opportunity and an increased voice in decision-making processes that affect them (Le Roux 2000; Hays 2007; Thiem and Hays 2014). Heckler points out that this attitude is surprising – but not only because it contradicts the common assumptions about Ju'hoan parents



Fig. 35: Jul'hoan girls attending Tsumkwe Primary School in 2010

(2002). It is surprising in light of the massive problems that San students experience in government schools – some of which have been described here. Furthermore, although education is often touted as the “key to a better future,” surviving the experience of schooling by no means guarantees a job – for San or for any other Namibians; unemployment is a problem throughout the country. In Tsumkwe, most jobs are occupied by non-Jul'honasi (see Hays et al. 2014). Heckler puts it well: “[I]t is a wonder that any San parents send their children off to school. It would seem that in many ways, school itself is the first of many cycles of marginalization that will grip San children in their lives” (2002:4). This is an important and necessary twist in perspective and highlights some critical points. Rather than apathetic, ignorant parents and recalcitrant children, we have people who are navigating unfamiliar terrain, clearly striving to gain access to a system that they recognize to be utterly critical to their survival – but which plays such a profound role in their current disempowerment. The following chapter will describe the complicated aspects of parental and broader community participation in schooling in Nyae Nyae.

On the other hand, the students who stay in Tsumkwe School have their reasons for staying, which are also revealing. These include: emotional and other support from older siblings who are at the school or from relatives who live in Tsumkwe; having parents or

other close relatives who are working (even if they were not in Tsumkwe) and who can support them materially; and a very strong desire to stay in school. The students who stayed in school would often admit that it was very difficult, but say that they just “forced” themselves to continue. In the end, however, for the majority, these reasons were not enough to keep them in school long-term and very few continued long enough to receive any formal qualifications. Although the administration of the Tsumkwe schools has a tendency to downplay the depth of the problems there, they are a source of tremendous frustration for parents and students alike.

What can we do?

[Before Independence], the problem was that people didn’t want us to attend school, only to work. Now we are supposed to attend school, and there is no work. But there are also so many problems with the school, and our children keep dropping out. What can we do? [Ju’hoan man, April 2002]

As the conversation between the Ju’hoan mother and the Tsumkwe school officials described in Chapter 4 illustrates, government officials and others place the responsibility of ensuring the children come to school on the parents – as is the norm for cultures that demand obedience from children. In that example, the principal and vice principal are so focused on this as the solution to the problem, that they do not hear the actual concern that the mother is voicing about the school food. They did not address this issue in the discussion, nor was it practically resolved.

For the Ju’hoan parents, however, students will do what they *themselves* are motivated to do, and their main concern is that the school provide an attractive environment for the children in which their needs are met, so that the children will attend and learn the valuable skills the school is supposed to provide. Unfortunately, the school environment is often anything but pleasant for the Ju’hoan and other San learners. In general, children’s participation in the school is marked by threats – of punishment for poor performance or absenteeism, and beatings and other abuse from other children at the school. The contrast between this and the tolerant and supportive atmosphere of their home villages is one reason that Ju’hoan students choose to leave the government school in Tsumkwe. One solution, as noted earlier, is to make concerted efforts to improve the environment at the school. There are many reasonable measures that could be taken to facilitate dialogue and communication among the community, the school officials and the students at the school. However, the school has not engaged with the community on any of these issues in the past, and most

of the positions at the school are filled by other ethnic groups – including those for which there are qualified Jul’hoansi (see Hays et al. 2014).

The primary solution proposed by the Jul’hoansi, with remarkable consistency, is for the Village Schools to go up to higher grades, so that the children will be older and, importantly, bigger, when they go to Tsumkwe school, and better able to stand up for themselves. Community members have proposed several suggestions for how this could be organized; these suggestions have been recorded in reports (see Hays et al. 2010; Ninkova 2015). However, this solution is not considered workable by the government or others involved, primarily because of the difficulty that already exists with training teachers up to Grade 3. Getting Jul’hoansi-speaking individuals qualified by the Ministry of Education to teach up to Grade 6 or 7 does not seem realistic to anyone at this time.

But like the school officials’ preconceived ideas about the Jul’hoansi prevent them from hearing or considering the legitimacy of their complaints about the school, the assumption that the only legitimate education is that provided by the mainstream government schools and teacher training programs has prevented real consideration of alternatives. Possibilities include educational options that are flexible enough to account for the learners’ various social and economic needs; that are self-initiated; and that respond to the real economic opportunities available to community members. The following chapter will take a closer look at the processes of community consultation about education in Nyae Nyae.

10 Community consultation and participation

They [outsiders] come to ask us [the Ju'l'hoansi of Nyae Nyae] what we want. But when we say what we want, and it is not what they want us to say, they will just say that it is the *other* outsiders who have told us what to say.

[Fieldnotes September 2001, community meeting¹]

The continuous talk [of the community] about a “single school” in Baraka ... and about providing tuition [in the villages] beyond Grade 3, needs to be stopped by a clear Ministry directive.

[Pfaffe 2001:15]

Our idea is to upgrade the Baraka School, to start there – it is close, and the parents can go and stay. We want Baraka to go up to higher grades, and we want to upgrade all of the Village Schools up to grades 6 or 7. Then the kids will be ready to go to Tsumkwe.

[Ju'l'hoan father from Makuri, December 2007]

The school should be upgraded to Grade 7, and we need a hostel. The kids are too young to go to Tsumkwe – they get bullied. They should stay longer in the villages.

[Ju'l'hoan father from Den|ui, June 2014]

Village Schools Objective 3: To develop a relevant curriculum and curricular material in consultation with communities

I have placed this objective last, out of sequence, in order to explore the issue of *community consultation* in light of the discussions of the previous chapters. Although the objective specifically refers to the curriculum and material, this element of the Village Schools took a back seat early on as the emphasis on transition of the project to the Ministry of Education became increasingly prioritized – as was indicated in Chapter 6. In this chapter, I am focusing on the general aspect of participation and consultation.

I have described in the preceding chapters some ways in which Ju'l'hoan parents and community members became alienated from educational decision-making processes regarding the VSP and their children's education. But why should this happen, in a project

¹ The purpose of the meeting was to respond to the consultancy report referred to later in this chapter, a Field Study on the Actual Situation Regarding the Teaching and Learning Environment of Ju'l'hoan communities in Tsumkwe and Gobabis Districts (Pfaffe 2001), and to prioritize the concerns of the Ju'l'hoan community before an upcoming wider meeting about the VSP in Windhoek that would also involve non-Ju'l'hoan stakeholders, including donors, NGO representatives and project advisors.

so carefully based upon community consultation and participation? This chapter describes two general aspects of community involvement in the Village Schools. One is the issue of community participation in the various aspects of the schools themselves – including work such as the construction and maintenance of the buildings or structures and assistance with food preparation and transportation, as well as participation in the pedagogical process itself. Secondly, there is the process of community consultation by outsiders to find out what the community wants – this can take the form of a formal commissioned report, or informal processes that feed into decision-making processes of those who are in a position to make decisions about the Village Schools. Both of these aspects will be discussed here.

I argue that there are a great many barriers to achieving representative community input; these include language and other communication barriers, differences of opinion within the community, and cultural differences in group decision-making processes. Nonetheless, when these differences are taken into consideration, nagging problems remain. In the second half of the chapter, I summarize some of the clear and consistent requests that the Ju'hoansi are making during consultation meetings and other processes, and ask why these so often go unheeded.

Community involvement in the Village Schools

At the inauguration ceremony for the VSP in 1993, the student teachers performed a short skit illustrating a child-centered teaching approach for an audience that included the well-known Minister of Education and Culture, Nahas Angula, along with a number of other guests (see Chapter 5). As they were acting out their teaching in one of the village school classrooms, a group of parents rushed into the classroom, pretending to drag their children out to accompany them on a gathering trip. Unable to convince the children to stay in the classroom, the teacher followed them and their parents to the bush and continued his teaching there. Thus the lesson was integrated into an activity that the children enjoyed and with which they were familiar (Brörmann 1993).

This dramatization was performed to make the visitors aware of the importance of flexibility and parental involvement in the curriculum. The elders of the community were incorporated into the original curriculum, and with their stories and knowledge they saw themselves as “living books” (Hitchcock and Bieseke, 2000:245). In addition to incorporating the knowledge of elders into the curriculum, the VSP was designed to link up with an adult literacy program and to create a learning environment in which adults and children could learn together, and from each other, both ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ skills relevant to their lives. The reasoning for this was clearly and thoughtfully articulated in government reports

and other documents by government officials and consultants involved at the time; always along with the need to ensure that these considerations did not overshadow the importance of transition to the government schools, as the quote below illustrates:

If the education is not good enough and interesting enough, the children will just not go to school and the parents will not force them. The curriculum and materials therefore had to be developed to be relevant and interesting to the lives of Ju'hoan children in order to maintain interest and engagement in school activities. In this regard, parents, learners and student teachers were involved in curriculum and language development. Language, folk-tales and stories received a lot of attention, and traditional skills like tracking formed the basis for developing some science materials. One important guiding principle, however, was that the village school curriculum was to dovetail with the national curriculum to ensure that children could relatively easily make the transition to the government school [Avenstrup and Swarts 1999:8]

Community involvement in the schools declined in the early years, and has been an ongoing issue of concern over the following two decades. One reason may be the difficulty of including the parents in the process of curriculum and materials development, particularly as the process became seen as being the responsibility of the government and the materials are created according to more standardized models. Although care was taken to consult the teachers about the cultural content of the Molteno materials, community input into a set of materials that has already been largely developed will obviously be limited. Furthermore, although the teachers were selected by their communities, they represented an “elite” group. Their opinions about the cultural content of the curriculum materials may not necessarily represent those of the communities at large, but could reflect their own goals and aspirations (Crawhall 1998). If there are gaps developing between the teachers and the communities, including only teachers in consultation processes will have the function of widening it.

As described in Chapter 7, however, there are deeper cultural issues at play; one is how to handle the question of *payment*. The teachers and literacy promoters are paid, and other community members sometimes see themselves as being the source of that income through their own, or their children's, attendance. It proved to be difficult to convince people to simply ‘help’ at the school without being paid or otherwise reimbursed (as noted in Chapter 5). In addition, parents might see going to school as an activity completely separate from going to the bush – this was expressed by the VS principal, Cwi, in his presentation at the WIPCE in Melbourne:

Involving the parents in the Village Schools has also been difficult. We want the parents to come to the school to tell stories, and to come with the teacher and the children out into the bush to show them plants and tracks. If the parents are involved, then we can include the traditional culture in school, and also the children will see

their parents engaging with the school and will understand that school is important. But most parents think school is only for teachers and the learners, and they do not participate. The children then also get the message from their parents that school is not that important. This has been a problem for a long time, and we have many workshops and meetings to make them feel more involved in the school. [Cwi 2008]

Efforts to foster community participation were integral to the early design of the project, and are crucial to the success of the project, and early reports indicate that the communities were enthusiastic and participated (NNDFN 1994; Bieseke 1992). At the same time, as described in previous chapters, the expectation that people be paid – or otherwise compensated – for doing work at or with the schools has been an issue from early on. This does not necessarily indicate a lack of support for the project. Len Le Roux,² in a 1998 evaluation of the Village Schools, reports that the Nyae Nyae community had “a very acute sense of ownership of the Village Schools Project” and that “there is a high sense of commitment to the project”. Throughout my own research, people have expressed a strong sense of ownership of the project. At the same time, they experienced a great deal of frustration about the difficulty in making their voice heard – examples of this will be explored later in the chapter.

What do people want?

As has been emphasized and explored throughout this book, the difficulty of the transition of the Village School students to the government school has been consistently perhaps the most problematic aspect of the project. During the time of my fieldwork in 2001–2002, people in the Nyae Nyae community were far from uninvolved with the schools. Interviews on the topic, workshops, and casual conversations around the fire all revealed a high level of discussion, and a number of carefully considered solutions were proposed to the problems surrounding the transition to Tsumkwe school. When I returned in 2007, I found that these solutions were still being discussed, and versions of them have continued to circulate in the years since then (see the quotes at the beginning of the chapter and Hays et al. 2010). One solution that was commonly proposed was to consolidate the Village Schools into a central school at the Baraka training center, with a hostel for the students, most of whom would board at the school.

Although consolidation of the schools would go squarely against one of the ideals underpinning the vision of the project – to provide education in the first three years as close to home as possible and with participation from the home communities – arguments for this

² No relation to Willemien le Roux, who conducted the regional survey and is mentioned elsewhere in this report.

move included greater support for, and communication among, the teachers, and greater ease in the provision of services. It would give the Ju'hoan students all around the conservancy a chance to get used to schooling with those outside their own small communities – but still within an environment that is largely Ju'hoansi. This, it was thought, would help make the transition to Tsumkwe much easier. A variation of this solution proposed by the Ju'hoan members of the VSP School Committee at a meeting in February 2002 was that the Village Schools should continue up to Grade 3, and that the school at Baraka should go up to at least Grade 7, allowing the Ju'hoan students time to integrate among themselves before having to move to a more diverse environment.

Although the idea of such a school was greeted with enthusiasm at the meeting in Baraka, people from other villages were less enthusiastic. In part this was because of general unhappiness with Baraka, which had come to be seen as an “elite” village of those who are employed by the conservancy (see also Bieseke and Hitchcock 2011). The idea was not abandoned, however, and in later years there have been further discussions – including suggestions that such a school could be constructed elsewhere. Concern has been expressed, including by development workers – that a village with a consolidated school would face many of the same problems as Tsumkwe – infiltration by outsiders, shebeens, and increased levels of violence.

A frequent suggestion was that there should be more Village Schools, perhaps one in every village – a suggestion that is, in fact, within the initial project goals (Objective 4). People often suggested that the Village Schools should go higher than Grade 3. The solutions proposed usually contained some combination of these ideas. Although none of these solutions is problem-free, neither are they absurd or completely unrealistic. The suggestions above express a strong desire for access to mainstream education, but in their own language and close to their own communities – which, as I have emphasized, is pedagogically sound, and meets Namibian educational policy recommendations. Furthermore, this is in keeping with what the international indigenous rights movement recognizes within the right to education, as outlined in Chapter 3. Before exploring some dynamics around these suggestions and possible models, I would like to briefly discuss some of the difficulties surrounding community consultation.

Consultation processes at Nyae Nyae

Over the past few decades, the concept of “participatory development” has become mainstream, and development organizations are obliged to show that they have incorporated the intended beneficiaries in project design and implementation. Participatory development

and its inherent paradoxes are seldom interrogated within the development world, however, and community opinion is, as Bieseke puts it, an “elusive commodity,” much easier to achieve in theory than in practice (Bieseke 1993:24; see also Green 2000). An even bigger problem, however, is that incomplete, or biased, understandings of “what it is that people want” are presented as if they represent the complete sum of people’s needs and desires: “Too often ... facile statements are made by outsiders ... each one claiming privileged knowledge about ‘what the people want’. These statements may become the basis of decisions and plans which really reflect First World projections” (ibid.). This quotation neatly sums up the problem of shallow, superficial research: rather than contributing to community control, it often serves to reinforce existing power structures – both global and local. This fact is not lost on the San themselves, as is illustrated by the following statement made by a Namibian San woman to Willemien Le Roux: “The problem is that there are people who give wrong information to researchers. Those people then get power and wrong things are put in place which we cannot change” (1999:54).

Furthermore, research conducted in isolation or with solely academic goals can serve merely to place additional strain on the communities without offering much in return. Swarts and Avenstrup emphasize that while fieldwork and other research is necessary: “[T]his must be properly worked out and co-ordinated. As it is now, researchers come and go like tourists and write their articles, theses and books abroad. Little of it helps the Bushmen, who remain study objects of the researchers” (1995:22).³

One thing desperately needed at Nyae Nyae is a greater understanding of – and respect for – decision-making patterns and ways of relating to each other, and the impact these have had upon the implementation of projects, including the Village Schools. These patterns and relations are not static, and research should be ongoing with the constant aim of contributing to the efforts of the Ju’hoan community to gain control over their own educational processes. This is not an easy endeavor. This section outlines some of the pitfalls of community consultation among the Ju’hoansi, using the Nyae Nyae Village Schools as an example.

Designed in a participatory context, the VSP was a community based project – planned and implemented with the active involvement of the Nyae Nyae communities. Even with the best intentions, however, it is extremely difficult to ensure that adequate community representation is achieved and maintained. In very remote and marginalized communities, such as the Nyae Nyae, several important factors come into play. Many of these are based

³ Although this description is accurate in one sense – both for Nyae Nyae and for other southern African San communities – many researchers, including those described in this book, actively oppose this situation and are themselves practicing engaged research and working towards objectives that the communities define.

primarily in cultural and communicational differences as outlined in the following section. Furthermore, there is a split in the views among outsiders as to whether the Ju'hoansi (and other San) want and are able to continue practicing their traditional skills and lifestyle, or whether the focus should be upon integrating into the political and economic mainstream (see Hays 2007), and this debate has relevance to educational opportunities in the area. In the past, a primary problem with the interpretations of outsiders is the assumption that one general solution will be the best thing for the community, and that this solution will fit within the institutions of mainstream society. In a community where survival depends upon the ability to access a wide variety of scarce resources, the strategic choices of the community may not always be obvious as such to outsiders.

Challenges

There are few people who have been through an odyssey like that of the Ju'hoansi of Nyae Nyae, the chosen ones for an array of government and NGO development initiatives. [Wiessner 2004:149]

A community like the Nyae Nyae Ju'hoansi, who – as Wiessner suggests above – became a “target” of development initiatives in the 1990s, also experience a great deal of consultation about what they want and need. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the voices of the community actually are heard, understood, or factored into the decisions that get made. In reality, there are a great number of barriers between the people on the ground whom projects are supposed to serve, and those who actually make the decisions that impact on them. These decisions may be financial (how government or donor money gets spent); political (how representation of the community is structured in local, national, or other political arenas); or political-ideological (does one ethnic group have the right to refuse the entry of another into their territory?). They may be about who has the right to hunt which animals, and how; about who can occupy local positions of power in the community; or about what kind of literacy materials to use in a mother tongue education project, or what the goals of the project should be. Some of the ways in which difficulties with community consultation among the Ju'hoansi take shape are fairly obvious and identifiable; others are buried deeper within the discourse of “consultation” and must be drawn out.

Power differentials

First, there is the tremendous difference in power and material wealth among the various players, including donors, government, NGOs and the community members. Consultation rarely, if ever, takes place among actors on an equal footing and it is not always possible to

predict how this will affect responses when questions are posed to the communities about 'what they want'. In addition the way that questions are put to people, and the way that people understand their options, may lead to answers that do not necessarily reflect the true wishes of the community. These are constraints and conditions that all researchers must recognize and find ways of compensating for.

Even more problematic, however, is when these power differentials are either ignored or abused. Researchers and development workers can have very strong personal opinions about the direction that projects in the Nyae Nyae area should take. As the quotes at the beginning of this chapter indicate, at least some Jul'hoansi perceived that what they said to outside researchers were easily slotted into current debates and either accepted or rejected on that basis – rather than on a real understanding of what is happening on the ground.

Presumed difference in knowledge, experience or expertise

A separate but related issue is the difference in realms of knowledge and experience on the part of outsiders versus community members. The question of how to involve community members in decisions that are made about things that are (or are at least assumed to be) beyond their area of experience is not easily answered. One example is the decision about what method of Jul'hoansi literacy teaching to use, as Crawhall has pointed out (1998). Are members of a community that does not have a tradition of reading and writing equipped to make such a decision? How can they acquire the information and experience they need to make decisions? One solution to this dilemma is to conduct training workshops to provide people with the information that they need to make the necessary decisions. This is not without its problems, for such workshops can be expensive and time-consuming and cannot always adequately cover the issues. Furthermore, there is the question of *who* exactly is trained. The whole community? Or selected members? If the latter, there are other issues that arise, as illustrated by the sections below.

In a paper describing the early teacher training, Pfaffe highlights the lack of familiarity that the Nyae Nyae community had with concepts such as the economic efficiency of donkeys versus a vehicle. Although the community had been pressing for a vehicle to meet their transportation needs, once they found out that the price of one four-wheel-drive truck was the equivalent of 800 donkeys, they were able to make a more informed decision (1995). In such cases, community workshops can facilitate community decision-making processes by providing information and perspectives that they might not otherwise have.

On the other hand, the assumption that the community is unable to fully grasp the principles necessary to make informed decisions has also contributed to a situation in which the informed feedback from the community is not acknowledged. When people say what they

want, these requests are easily dismissed with reference to a lack of understanding. Particularly damaging in this respect is the local stereotype of the San as “child-like”, discussed in more detail later in this section.

Differences of opinion within the community

Communities are not homogeneous but are composed of individuals, with their own, sometimes competing, motivations and differences in opinion among the community must be taken into consideration. These may be “neutral” differences that merely reflect personal preferences, goals or aspirations. For example, consultations by Bieseke among the Nyae Nyae communities in 1995 found that “... some said that an ultimate goal was to learn to use English well and that the best road to that was via a good start in Jul’hoansi. Some said that learning Jul’hoansi literacy was an end in itself, because they did not want their language to disappear” (Hitchcock and Bieseke, 2000:245). If differing goals such as these entail different approaches to, for example, materials production, it is important to recognize all of them in project planning.

Differences in opinion may reflect factions within the community. These can be between generations, along gender lines, or can reflect family or other political divisions. In such situations, if no attempt is made to address conflicting demands and if one “faction” is privileged over the other(s), a project can serve to perpetuate and intensify community conflict. In Nyae Nyae, for example, is a growing division between the youth and the elders, based largely on skills such as literacy and driving. Because these skills are closely associated with development projects, the opinions of people who have these skills may be more often sought, heard and implemented than those of the elders or others. This can be attributed to both the power that mobility and the written word confers on the younger leaders as well as feelings of intimidation and passivity on the part of the older leaders in the face of drastic social change. The result is that the community members most often consulted by outsiders may be the people least representative of greater community interests – though not necessarily so. To get accurate information, consultants and researchers need be aware of these dynamics.

In Chapter 3, I cited ethnographic research that describes the Jul’hoansi (and many other San groups) as prioritizing respect for individual choices and for a diversity of opinions within the community. My own research supports this; people expressed a variety of opinions, many of which could be perceived as conflicting but in practice are complementary. For example, some children say that it is important to attend school so that they can learn how to read and write and get jobs. Others say that they prefer to hunt in the bush. These answers reflect variation within the community as to which subsistence strategies individu-

als will pursue; this makes sense in the current circumstances. A report or paper that emphasizes only one of these responses does not give the full picture. It is equally important to recognize that, within this diversity, there are some common requests that keep resurfacing with remarkable consistency, but which seem to equally consistently go unheeded – I will return to this point below.

Language and communicative style

An obvious, but crucial, barrier to adequate consultation is the difficulty in understanding what people are actually saying to us. An important part of this has to do with language. As Biesele points out, many concepts central to understanding social issues at Nyae Nyae are unfamiliar and “couched in Ju’hoan words for which there is no easy English equivalent” (1993:17). Even with competent translation, difficulties in understanding can easily occur. Furthermore, as described in the section below, untranslated conversations among people can be an important part of decision making processes. Very marginalized groups such as the Ju’hoansi may express a desire for something merely because they see no other options or because they think it is what others want them to say. Given all of these complicating factors, it is dangerous for one researcher to claim to have privileged information about “what the people want” – particularly if the opinion being promoted effectively rules out other possible options.

Cultural differences in decision-making processes

Cultural differences in decision-making processes can result in drastically different understandings of what has been agreed upon. The need for clear “evidence” of consultation, as can be provided by workshops and formal meetings, means that this is often the way that decisions, made in conjunction with outsiders (such as donors, NGO workers, or government officials) regarding the design and implementation of development projects, are structured. However, most decision-making processes in the Nyae Nyae (and many other) communities happen informally. They occur through discussions conducted in the local language that involved outsiders usually do not understand.⁴ If decisions made informally contradict those made during the formal meetings, breakdowns will occur. There are three ways in particular that this easily happens with the Ju’hoansi and other San groups.

Significant differences in standards of appropriate group behavior and social norms are an important, and often underestimated, difference. As has been emphasized throughout this section, behaviors considered acceptable, or even commendable in most Western

⁴ There are notable exceptions to this; some anthropologists and linguists who have been involved with education and development efforts at Nyae Nyae have learned to speak Ju’hoansi fluently.

societies, may be utterly anti-social among the Ju'hoansi. Biesele has described the strong resistance to democratic representation among the Ju'hoansi (1993a; 1994; 1995); I experienced this in my own research. People do not like to decide for others; likewise people do not like to be spoken for. If consultative meetings include only a few community members, others may feel that they have not had their full input into the decision. This puts the representative in a very awkward position, and can cause deep resentment and community discord.

Secondly, even at meetings that include a broad sector – or even all – of the community (if it is held at village level), group behavior norms, if not understood, can lead to misperceptions. For example, a common pattern is the appearance of agreement at a meeting, only to have individuals later register their dissatisfaction with decisions made at the meeting. While translating some recordings from a School Committee meeting, I asked Hanga why a side conversation registering disagreement and recorded in Ju'hoansi was not brought into the general discussion (which had been conducted in both Ju'hoansi and English⁵). He responded that people will not voice their disagreement with a person at a meeting, but will rather talk about it later in smaller groups:

[S]ometimes in meetings you can see most of the people are not talking, but in the break most *will* be talking to each other, and maybe there they will disagree. But if one person says something in a meeting and someone disagrees, they will not say anything right away, but they will come back to it later. They will talk to some other people and see if some agree with them, and they will talk about it later. [Fieldnotes, April 2002]

Hanga revealed an extreme reluctance in Ju'hoan culture to contradict someone in public; this is particularly true if it is someone with whom one has a relationship that requires maintaining some formality.⁶ This seems to be a dominant characteristic of many San cultures, and is frequently remarked upon by those who work with San communities.

A third consideration along these lines is that of cultural differences in understandings about who must be consulted about various kinds of decisions. For example, in most western cultures children are not routinely consulted about issues such as what kind of education they want. In Ju'hoan culture, however, children are treated as individuals with their

⁵ The English was for both the benefit of the VSP Coordinator and myself.

⁶ Lee describes the difference between joking and avoidance relationships. The latter require one to treat the other with utter respect and some distance, and are maintained between generations one remove from each other, for example, between the self and parents, aunts, uncles, offspring, nieces and nephews (and any others within the generation immediately above or below him or her). As Lee describes, these biological relationships are complicated by “fictitious” kinship networks (2013). These dynamics are far from readily apparent to outsiders, although they, and their impact on decision-making processes, will be articulated by people if asked.

own free will and the decision about whether or not they attend school, and which school, will ultimately be made by them, not their parents. The Village Schools children are commonly described as “voting with their feet.” If they don’t like something that is going on in the school, they simply don’t attend. Ultimately they will decide the fate of the Village Schools. As described in the previous chapter, for people coming from a western perspective the assumption is generally that parents should have control over their children and they may neglect to structure consultation processes in ways that allow children to express the kind of school environment they want.

Hunger

In addition to power differentials, community factions, and cultural and linguistic differences, an extremely important variable that impacts upon consultation efforts, and that can at times take precedence over all other factors, is *hunger*. As has been noted elsewhere in this book and cannot be overemphasized – for people in Nyae Nyae, food availability fluctuates greatly, and depends upon several factors, many of which are utterly outside of their control (such as weather patterns and the availability of veld food, the decision of the government whether or not to deliver food rations, the number of visiting tourists and researchers, and how much money they will spend or food they will share).

Wiessner provides an analysis of subsistence activities between 1996–2003 that describes a very bleak situation at Nyae Nyae and concludes that hunger was a predominant factor in the lives of most Nyae Nyae Ju’hoansi (2004). Citing Dirks (1980), she notes, “hunger is not only damaging to the physical body but to the spirit, common sense, and the social fabric. Hungry people make poor decisions” (152). Regardless of the cultural sensitivity of any researcher or other involved party, if long-term decisions are to be made, food security must be met. Ensuring access to food, without further contributing to the problem of dependency is not an easy task, and I do not here propose a simple solution to that problem. However, recognizing this limitation of the consultation process, and of any project, is key to evaluating the success of either effort.

The San as “child-like”

Finally, I would like to note one particular aspect of discourses about the San that influence consultation processes – the construction of the San as being *child-like*. This construction is extremely common in southern Africa, particularly among people who work with the San in one capacity or another (Suzman 2000; Hays 2007). Suzman notes that the metaphor of the Ju’hoan as “child” came up in almost every conversation he had with Afrikaner farmers and Herero concerning the Ju’hoansi (2000:49). As Suzman describes, and as I

have previously discussed (Hays 2007), this sentiment is so ubiquitous that even where it is not directly expressed, it can lead a discounting of legitimate opinions expressed by the Ju'hoansi.

As Suzman points out, one particular aspect of this is the characterization of San as having no concept of “time,” that they “live in the moment” and are unable to make long-term decisions or “plan for the future” (2000:48). This characteristic is supported by multiple forms of (supposed) evidence, including their seeming inability to make long-term business decisions, and a supposed absence from their languages of temporal tenses other than the present (Hays 2007). However, what may appear to outsiders to be a short-term solution can be an integral part of long-term economic strategies; for example, a reliance upon sharing with others when one has access to resources, with the understanding that later they will share with you. Maintaining relationships among individual relatives and related groups is a long-term economic strategy for San communities; as is maximizing resources when they are available. To refuse such a service to relatives in the short term is to jeopardize long-term security. The decision-making processes that result from these priorities may contradict previous agreements about development projects.

To label such strategies as short-term, however, is a serious injustice to peoples like the San. We may reasonably turn the question back on ourselves and to question our own preoccupation with accumulation. When we do, the irony becomes apparent: the San are said to have no concept of long-term planning despite the fact that San populations have survived for thousands of years in southern Africa. Meanwhile, the sustainability of Western approaches is far less proven, and could very well end disastrously. We may well ask who, in fact, are the short-term planners.

The image of the San as preoccupied with the present, or otherwise unable to make good decisions, strongly contributes to a failure to critically examine the requests of the San when they are consulted, and to take them seriously. In the rest of this chapter, I provide some examples from my fieldwork of situations in which the Ju'hoansi are expressing their educational needs – and some ways in which these requests are denied legitimacy. The justification for discounting their input takes a few basic forms, all of which reflect the metaphor of the San as child-like or otherwise unable to make informed decisions.

“What can we do?”

Despite the difficulties described above, there are some issues on which the Ju'hoansi of Nyae Nyae *have* been remarkably consistent throughout their years of being consulted about education. These include a desire for education in their own language for longer than

the first three years, greater access to non-formal education, and they want the environment of the government school to be better for their children. Besides these general consistent requests, the most striking characteristics of Ju'hoansi responses to questions about education is the lack of assumption that the same solution will work for all individuals. When asked what they think should happen with their children's schooling, Ju'hoan parents often emphasize that there should be different options, and that individuals will decide for themselves what they want to do. For example, when people suggested that the Village Schools should go beyond Grade 3, to higher grades, they would often note that this would allow those children that want to go on with schooling but stay in the village to do so, and those that want to go elsewhere for school will have that option.

The following examples illustrate the ways in which people are, in fact, expressing what it is that they want. I also argue that these desires are not at all naïve or unreasonable. The Ju'hoansi are expressing very clearly how they think their educational needs could best be met and they strongly express a desire for flexibility within their educational options. Why are they so hard to hear?

The Village Schools School Committee (VSSC) meeting

The following discussion took place at a meeting of the Village Schools School Committee on February 28, 2002. The purpose of the meeting was to get input from the School Committee on some key issues regarding the VSP, one of which was the proposed expansion of the project. This possibility was the subject of initial discussion within their support organization, the NNDFN, and some discussion of the issue had already taken place at the meeting. Towards the end of the meeting, I was given a chance to ask some questions of those present. The following conversation was in response to my question about what grade people thought the Village Schools should go up to. I asked the question because in there had been much discussion during the preceding months about whether the schools went up to Grade 4. Although they were only supposed to go up to Grade 3, many children said they were in Grade 4. People I talked to in the villages had often expressed a desire for the Village Schools to continue to higher grades. This part of the conversation took place in Ju'hoansi; it was recorded and later I worked together with my field assistant Hanga to translate it:

Kiewiet [chair of the Village Schools Committee]: Earlier it was said that Baraka should be upgraded to Grade 6 or 7; I agree because it will help the kids to go forward. When some of them are in 7 and go to Tsumkwe for 8, the ones in Grade 3 will see the older ones going higher.

Hanga: The age of the Village Schools learners is important, because if a student starts Grade 2 at 16 or 18, when he comes to Tsumkwe he won't be accepted because in Grade 4 he will be 20 or 21, and that is not allowed.

Kiewiet: It is good to have the kids from 1–7 at the Village Schools, so that when they come to Tsumkwe school they are in a higher grade and will be able to stay with other kids, Kavangos and Hereros.⁷ The child will be grown up and will know how to handle these things. The kids come back with stories of being mistreated ... older kids will know how to handle it. We should talk to government so they can assist with books and upgrading the school.

Hanga: The Village Schools kids are starting late at school, so they start in Grade 1 when the years are almost 10, 11, 12; the age one should start is from 7–8.

Rolf [teacher and parent]: The kids who are in Grades 1–3 could still be at the VS, some people wanted the school in Baraka to be upgraded to Grade 7, so the kids who pass to Grade 4 could come to Baraka after the VS, to start there, then from Grade 7 would go to Tsumkwe.

Xoan||'an [community representative and parent]: Yes, so that the kids can see the elder ones in the higher grade, so they can have that spirit to go for schooling up to the higher grades and also want to be in Grade 10. It is a way to motivate the young ones.

Kiewiet: To have Grade 1–6 at Baraka, that is a good idea, it should also be presented to the ministry, we can request that. Because the learners are having a problem with going to Tsumkwe and then coming back, they drop out because they are not used to the other kids. So if they go up to Grade 6, or 7, then they will know most of the things, which can help them to fit with the other kids in Tsumkwe.

Confirming the input of people in villages throughout the conservancy, the Village School Committee members at this meeting expressed a desire for children to go higher in the Village schools. One important reason given is delayed entry into TJSS, so that children will be better equipped – educationally, socially, and physically – to make the transition. Another is to begin to create a “culture of schooling” in recognition that this will be the most effective way to encourage the younger children to continue with school. Another important point

⁷ These are other Bantu-language speaking groups who live in the general area, many of whom live in or send their children to the government school in Tsumkwe. Children in these groups tend to be physically larger than the Jul'hoansi and are generally perceived by many as aggressive towards Jul'hoansi children (although cross-group friendships certainly do also occur).

here is brought up twice by Hanga – that the Village Schools children are not starting school at an age that will allow them transfer into the government school system. Here I focus on the desire for the Village Schools to go higher than Grade 3, and will return to the issue of the strict age categories later.

Both possibilities for expansion of the VSP discussed here – extending all of the Village Schools higher, and the suggestion of having a consolidated San school at Baraka from Grades 4–7 – had come up before and came up in subsequent discussions at villages. Some liked the idea of consolidation in Baraka (either from Grade 1 or starting in Grade 4). These were often people living in or close to Baraka or who had family there. Other Ju'hoansi were skeptical about the consolidation in Baraka, but strongly supported the idea of schools that went higher than Grade 3 in the villages. Others continued to emphasize the need for adult education, especially literacy classes. Almost invariably, however, people expressed a strong desire to have schooling in their own language, close to their villages, much higher than Grade 3.

Sometimes, people would make statements like the following from a group interview in Djxokhoe village, which does not have a school (JH is the author; the two respondents, ‡Oma and K|ace, are both fathers):

‡Oma: I suggest that children should school somewhere far from their parents, like Grootfontein, or Otjiwarango.⁸

JH: Why?

‡Oma: Because children run away from Tsumkwe, and parents don't tell them to go back to school.

K|ace: I also want children to go far away, so they won't run home.

JH: Will that be difficult for the children, and for the parents, if they are so far away?

K|ace: Yes ... but from Tsumkwe, the kids are coming home. If they go far away and someone takes care of them, it is better ...

If one stopped the conversation here, it would appear that the people were asking for their children to be sent away. However, a bit later during this same discussion, I asked whether and how they thought Tsumkwe School or the Village Schools could be improved, and got the following replies from the same two men:

⁸ Two towns which are several hundred kilometers away.

‡Oma: Maybe if the Village Schools could go up to Grade 8 or 9, then the kids can go to TJSS when they are older ... because at that school, the older kids there beat the younger ones.

Klace: We took the children to Tsumkwe, because we thought maybe people from another culture could teach the kids nicely. But now we have this problem with the witchcraft. So that is why I am thinking about trying somewhere else, I just want my children to learn. I think there is no way the kids can learn here, that's why I want them to go somewhere else. My kids want to learn, they want to go to school. What can they do? [Fieldnotes, April 2002]

The conversations above represent many similar ones I have had with Ju'hoansi parents and community leaders – they very much understand the importance of education and they are frustrated with the undelivered promises of schooling.

A consultancy report

These requests – for more Village Schools and/or for consolidated Ju'hoan schools that go up to higher grades – have been repeated throughout all the field visits I have made to Nyae Nyae. I would like to return to the short-term consultancy report mentioned above, conducted for GTZ which was supporting the AfriLa project. This project had been requested by NIED to include Ju'hoansi as a target language and the report aimed to provide a “comprehensive assessment of the current situation regarding the present teaching and learning environment in Ju'hoan communities,” including both general issues as well as those relating specifically to the integration of the language into the AfriLa project (Pfaffe 2001:7).

One objective of this report was to “closely analyze the current problem areas” in Ju'hoan language education (primarily the VSP) and to propose an “emergency intervention strategy” to address the increasing absenteeism associated with the VSP (Pfaffe 2001:9). The absenteeism is identified as being two-fold: VSP teachers are frequently absent from their classrooms, and learners who attended the VSP and who are now supposed to be at TJSS are often absent from the government school. At the time of its release, which was close to the start of my fieldwork in Nyae Nyae, this report was widely circulated and frequently cited in meetings and interviews with government officials and others involved with the VSP. Although it evoked indignation and frustration from Ju'hoansi and others involved (or familiar) with the VSP, the report struck a chord with many, including donors, development

workers, and government representatives, and is thus worth examining here, in light of the arguments that I have made above and previous chapters.

The report identifies the failure of the VSP students to transition successfully to TJSS as an indicator of an impending crisis within the project, and recommends a series of short- and long-term interventions to address this situation. Much of the blame is placed on the teachers, who are described as unprofessional, frequently absent without a valid reason,⁹ and abusing their status as teachers. The report recommends more support and training for the teachers, as well as a recruitment strategy to train more Ju'hoan teachers – an approach that most involved with the project agreed was crucial.

In a discussion of the high absenteeism from Tsumkwe School, the report goes on to note that, although students claimed that they were beaten and discriminated against at the school, it became clear during community meetings “that the children did not speak the truth to their parents and that they used an existing discontent among the parents to fuel existing prejudices, and thus to get away from the school” (Pfaffe 2001:14). The report further suggests that this problem is “reinforced” by the fact that there are learners at the Village Schools who are supposed to be in Grades 4, 5, or even 6, and faults parents for keeping them in the villages “under the false pretense that they would now be receiving Grade 4 tuition” (15).

The intervention strategy recommended to address this particular problem is three-fold. First, the MBESC should “issue a clear directive that the Village Schools can only offer tuition up to Grade 3, and that Village School promotion to Grade 4 will not be accepted”; secondly, they should “inform parents about MBESC’s directive” and, finally, should “lobby for parents to return their children to TJSS for the 2002 school year” (23). The only educational choice that is considered legitimate is the government school: “The learners need to be encouraged to stay in TJSS, since there is no alternative for receiving quality education” (15). What constitutes “quality education” is not specified in the document.

The report places the blame for the problems almost entirely on the community – on the teachers, the parents, and the children themselves, portraying them as dishonest, manipulative, or irresponsible. The recommendation is that the Ministry should make a top-down decision and that the parents should enforce it by “returning” their children to the government school. Reports of problems at the school are dismissed as being fabricated and no other possible reasons for the learners leaving the school are presented. Other than the teacher training programs, the report makes no suggestion for adult education or other non-formal education opportunities. Neither is the desire for children to have access to education in

⁹ Leaving to cash their check and buy groceries was not considered a valid excuse.

their own language for longer than three years considered legitimate: “The continuous talk about a ‘single school’ in Baraka ‘equipped with adequate hostels’ (N!ani 2000)¹⁰ ... and about providing tuition beyond Grade 3, needs to be stopped by a clear Ministry directive” (ibid.).

Although the report is based on consultation with the community, the responses of the Ju!hoansi are discounted as invalid. Evidence that is clearly presented in the report itself indicates that teachers, parents, and children are stating – either directly, or through their actions – the desire for the Village Schools to continue past Grade 3, and/or until the children are older. Some of the teachers have formally suggested a centralized school (as indicated by the citation in above quote), and parents are said to be encouraging children to stay for longer in the villages; for their part, the children themselves are also choosing to stay. This report is extreme in its recommendation that proposed changes should be completely ignored and overridden by the Ministry, however, it is not unusual in its dismissal of local attitudes.

Responses

The proposal that the Village Schools should go higher was never taken as a serious possibility by anyone I spoke with outside of the Conservancy. A number of reasons were given as to why this scenario would not work. The most important one was the lack of provision in Namibian education policy for “mother-tongue education” past Grade 3. In order for the Village Schools to go higher, the schools would have to be private, and since the communities were poor this meant that they would have to secure donor funding. In the development field, a “sustainable” project is one in which financial responsibility will ultimately be taken over by the government or the community members themselves. Securing an indefinite commitment to fund private schools in the Nyae Nyae area was not considered possible by anyone I spoke with. Another significant barrier was considered to be the lack of currently trained teachers up to Grade 6, and the difficulty in finding appropriate people and training them. A lack of existing curriculum and education materials for the higher grades was another objection.

In addition, concerns about the consolidation of the school at Baraka largely revolved around the potential for that town to become “another Tsumkwe” and for the shebeens and social problems they engendered in the main town to penetrate further into the conservancy (these in particular were expressed by Ju!hoansi and outsiders alike). These concerns are all legitimate. What is often ignored, however, is the absolute soundness of the opinions

¹⁰ The report cites this Village School teacher but does not provide a reference.

expressed by the Ju/'hoansi regarding education for their children. The most consistent requests of the Ju/'hoansi community are also consistent with educational research and with current international movements (see Chapters 3 and 6).

About two months after the story about witchcraft at TJSS had scared many Ju/'hoansi children away from the government school and back to their villages, I made a round of visits to the southeast corner of the Conservancy. One purpose of this trip was to find out what was happening with the children – were they at TJSS or a Village school? Were they home? What were people saying about education? Interviews and conversations during this visit confirmed what I had found elsewhere; most of the children had returned to the villages, giving all the reasons listed in Chapter 9, with fear of witchcraft and lack of food among the most common. Parents again expressed a desire for education closer to home, for help with transportation, and for adult education. The following section is an excerpt from my fieldnotes, describing a stop in a small village in this area, in which all of these concerns are highlighted.

Snapshot: Xamsa, April 26, 2002

We arrived in Xamsa on the way to Djxokhoe from Nama Pan Pos and found nine adults and about five children of varying ages in the village, including the owner of the n!ore (n!orekxao). They informed us that there were problems with the elephants – yesterday one destroyed the tree by the water hole. The n!orekxao was interested to find out what was happening at the Baraka Village School. The kids from Xamsa were not attending a Village School. Although there were two schools, Baraka and ||Auru, that were closer, getting a lift to Tsumkwe was far easier, so the kids started there from Grade 1. At the beginning of the year there had been many children from the village at Tsumkwe school, but most had dropped out – only two children were still attending TJSS (they were able to stay with relatives on the agriculture farm near Tsumkwe).

The adults present said that the children who dropped out had given different reasons for doing so. Some said it was because they did not have shoes or clothes, while others said the accommodation was not good and they did not get enough food. Some said it was because other children were stealing their plates, and the n!orekxao pointed out, “their parents are not working, so if their plates get stolen, they can’t buy more”.¹¹ One mother said, “the kids don’t stay at the school; if we take them to Tsumkwe they just follow us back to the village.” They said it would be better if the children had good accommodation in Tsumkwe, but there is no one else there for them to stay with. Although there are a few relatives in

¹¹ Not having plates usually means not being able to access the school food at meal times.

Tsumkwe, they said the problem is always *food* – at home they can get some food from the bush but neither they nor their relatives can afford to supply their children with store-bought food.

One man pointed out that they have been talking about problems at Tsumkwe for a long time but there are no changes, and so he has nothing more to say about that school. They would prefer that their children attend the school in Baraka – but they emphasized that the main problem is *transport*. The children can more easily get transport from Tsumkwe to come back and visit; from Baraka it is much more difficult. What about using donkeys? I asked. The man says they tried that, previously Xamsa had had two donkeys for themselves to use for the kids to go to school.¹² At that time, he says, there were two children going to the school in Baraka; they liked it and they liked riding the donkeys home for the weekends. But then the lions killed the donkeys, and they haven't gotten any more. Dahm, a young father present, emphasizes the safety aspect of the need for transport – there are many dangerous animals around here. All the parents expressed a desire for the children to attend school – they say the children are the only ones who can help the adults once they finish school. They try to encourage their children to stay there, they say, even though there are not enough clothes and there are so many problems. Next year, says the old man, we will try to force them.

When I ask them about their own experiences with the formal schools, Dahm (the only adult present who has had some formal schooling) compares his past experience with school and work under the colonial government with the present, and provides some illustrative contrasts. He says he went to a school for a few years during that time, but then stopped because he was ill and did not go back. He then started as a farm laborer, working primarily for food and a small salary of three rand a month, noting that “those years were bad for treatment, but the food and money were okay; a rand could buy more then. Now, people treat us better, but money is a problem. Most of the people are not working, and the money is worth less.” Not only was the economic situation different, but as Dahm describes it, the expectations also changed. He says that at that time, “the problem was that people didn't want us to attend school, only to work. Now we are supposed to attend school, and there is no work. But there are also so many problems with the school, and our children keep dropping out. What can we do?”

Later, as we are getting ready to leave for the next village, the people are talking amongst themselves. Dahm and another young man from Nṭama, a village that we had visited the day before, approached me and said that they want adult literacy classes. Since they did not

¹² This was while the Donkey Transportation Scheme (DOTS) program was functioning; see Chapter 6.

go to school, they say, maybe they can learn now to read and write, and then they can find work. "This whole area needs literacy classes," says the man from Nṭama. They have spoken to the local literacy promoter (a young Jul'hoan man), who told them that one person from the village needs to be trained so that this person can come back and teach. But they have had no news about this, and they still don't know what is happening with that. They say that there are many in the area that want literacy classes and they are just waiting to find out when someone can be trained. Clearly, this is something that they have thought about and discussed at length, and have followed up. Now they are waiting for answers.

No ignorant request

A number of points are illustrated here. First, we hear again the complaint about the problems at TJSS, and a sense of fatigue; after many efforts to inform people of these problems, nothing seems to improve. The issue of food is clearly paramount. For those at the hostels the lack of food was a reason for leaving; those who stay with relatives also struggle to get enough to eat. The point that food availability is higher in the village because they have access to bush foods testifies to their continued reliance upon gathering, and some hunting, for subsistence. The problem of transportation is emphasized. The donkeys were killed by lions, which both means that they don't have them anymore and is one of the main reasons that they do not want their kids to walk back and forth from school – there are lions in the area and it is dangerous.

The quote from Dahm provides a good summary of the situation in which many Jul'hoansi see themselves to be. This is expressed in many ways but seldom articulated as straightforwardly as this young man puts it. The rules of the game keep changing – not long ago they were strongly discouraged from schooling and treated badly – but there was access to food and resources. Now, everyone is expected to go to school (ostensibly to obtain greater access to jobs and cash), but this is not working. "What can we do?" was a common refrain to the recital of such problems.

As if in answer to their own question, the request for adult education in almost every village I visited was clear and consistent. This is not an ignorant request, rather a determined plea for assistance implementing a strategy that they believe will help them access the skills that they need. People's responses indicated an awareness of the numbers of adults needed to warrant a class in their village, and most who brought up the request to me either had an exact number of adults who wanted to take the classes or, as in the example above, were prepared to organize a count. Villagers often suggested that the children who had dropped out of school could join in an adult literacy class. The trained literacy workers, however, having been taught that adults and children require two different educational strategies, were not

so sure about this proposal; thus, although they would have been the best vehicles to push this request forwards, they seldom advocated for this community request.

Like the request for education in their own language and cultural milieu that continues up to higher grades, the desire for adult education, and its combination with other educational approaches, is sound pedagogical reasoning. In fact, as the experiences of indigenous peoples with education elsewhere reveals, multi-generational approaches to learning are often a very effective way to ensure that an education effort will benefit the community (see Kape'ahiokalani Padeken and Cooper 2000; Villegas et al. 2008). Taking into consideration the earlier discussion of pedagogical styles together with these requests for the Village Schools to go higher, the concern about the ages of the children not conforming to the strict age categories of the government school, and the desire for adult education, we can recognize in the requests of the Ju'hoansi a valid, culturally appropriate educational strategy. In effect, what the Ju'hoansi are asking for is *non-formal education* in order to gain access to the skills that they need and want, including literacy in both English and Ju'hoansi, math skills, and other forms of knowledge associated with mainstream education. While the Namibian Ministry of Education is making efforts to provide non-formal education to remote communities, these efforts are poorly funded and sparsely supported and an disproportionate emphasis is placed upon formal education for children.



Fig. 36: In the village of ||Auru, village residents gather in the campsite of the visiting anthropologist to drink tea, in 2001

Why, in a community project in which consultation is such a concern and in which the responses that people give are, in fact, in line with progressive, pedagogically sound, research-based educational approaches currently being promoted in southern Africa and elsewhere, are their concerns, actions, and opinions so easily dismissed? I have argued in this chapter that the consultation process, while ostensibly about providing communities with the opportunity to define their own development initiatives, in practice often fails to do so. In order to be considered legitimate, requests on the part of the community consulted must fit within the relatively narrow range of possibilities that are deemed acceptable by those who are in a position to make decisions about what is legitimate or not. The consultancy report discussed above provides one example of how easily requests by the community are dismissed.

Meanwhile, Jul'hoansi parents and children are in fact actively engaging in education – at the Village Schools, at the Tsumkwe School, and at what Heckler calls the *bush schools*: “the life-long learning that ... prepares them to live as hunter-gatherers” (2013, personal communication). The concluding chapter in this book will emphasize the ways in which the Nyae Nyae Community is responding to their educational challenges – though not always in ways that match what outsiders expect or recognize.

Conclusion: Owners of learning

There was the school – not only *not* an Indigenous institution but a historically repressive one, now positioned as an agent of community empowerment. There were Native teachers, graduates of those repressive institutions and conventional teacher education programs, now expected to enact radical pedagogical change. There were the parents, most of whom had little or no schooling or for whom it had been a punitive experience. And there were the students, for whom this was an induction into the culture of schooling. Pressed into all of this, deeply rubbed into every scene, was a long-established colonial educational system and a set of expectations firmly entrenched in paternalistic and assimilative aims. Finally there was the fact that all of this was being worked out under the magnifying lens of a national experiment... the demonstration project called upon teachers, parents, the school board, administrators, and students to chart completely new ground – but *within* the structural confines of an existing, non-Indigenous social-educational system.

[McCarty 2002:99]

In her book *Learning to be Navajo* (2002), Teresa McCarty provides an informed and insightful discussion of the enormous challenges that an indigenous school – *Diné Bi'ólta'*, “the People’s School” of the Navajo Community in Rough Rock, Arizona – faced during the first 25 years of its existence. This book, which was published as I was finishing my fieldwork in Nyae Nyae, inspired me as I struggled to analyze the complexities of the situation I had encountered at regional and local levels in my two years of fieldwork. McCarty describes her account as one “in search of local meanings” (2002:xvii), and the specific cultural and historical detail in her book provides a rich story and a powerful argument for the importance of deep understanding of specific cases. But her description of what this indigenous community school was up against resonates powerfully with the experiences of the Nyae Nyae Village Schools. The Navajo of the southwest United States and the Ju’hoansi of Namibia have little in common in many respects – they have different forms of social organization, different subsistence economies, different and unrelated languages, cultures, and historical trajectories. The local meanings, the micro-level observations of cultural values and language practices, and how these mesh with the requirements of schooling, must be closely observed to be understood, and we should be wary of generalizations.

What the striking parallels indicate, though, are that even where the details of the circumstances are so different, the structural barriers that indigenous children around the world face in education systems are linked to global patterns of dispossession and forced assimilation that indigenous peoples around the world have been confronted with – and which they continue to both resist and adapt to today. These patterns can manifest in sur-

prisingly similar ways. When we compare McCarty's description above to the description of the Village Schools in previous chapters, we find parents who have little experience with formal education and who feel insecure about their ability to contribute. We meet teachers, many of whose own educational experiences were in a system defined by "cultural deprivation theory;" who were taught that their language and culture were something to be overcome (rather than built upon). These teachers are now supposed to pave the way for a progressive alternative educational project, but – as McCarty so clearly points out – within the boundaries outlined by a system that fundamentally contradicts their own educational strategies and social values, in so many ways. Shifting educational policies, shifts in the outsiders who are playing key roles, and an increasing move towards incorporation into the mainstream educational system – all with the constant threats of funding cuts and policy changes hanging over the schools.

McCarty identifies the greatest challenges for schools like Rough Rock: approaches to schooling that prioritize compliance with national standards and English language education. Emphasis upon conforming to an idealized norm, she suggests, has the effect of simultaneously devaluing Indigenous knowledge, and jeopardizing children's life chances – as they struggle to succeed in a system in which so many cards are stacked against them.

I have chosen to highlight this comparison here because it pinpoints the very messages that I am hoping will come across regarding the Village Schools. I want to draw attention to some of the problematic patterns that the current approaches are in danger of reproducing. An important goal of this manuscript is to shed some light on the responses of the Ju'hoansi themselves to formal education. The previous chapters have given examples of what people are saying about the schools – but what are they *doing*, other than simply "dropping out"? Here I will explore some of the ways in which the Nyae Nyae Ju'hoansi are actively responding to their educational options, and adapting them to their own purposes.

Ju'hoansi approaches to formal education

As I have noted throughout this book, the Ju'hoansi themselves are very often blamed for their failure to participate in (or their withdrawal from) school. Children and parents are presented as rebellious, irresponsible, and unreasonable (even in some cases dishonest), or else as passive victims that are lacking something, whether it is access to the dominant language and culture, the necessary resources, the social capital, or the personal stamina to follow through with schooling. The strategic decisions that the Ju'hoansi are actively making about their educational choices, and in turn their life courses, are rare-

ly considered. The Ju'hoansi and other San groups may be extremely marginalized, but they are actively engaged in creating their own realities, from the circumstances that are available to them, in ways that are based upon their own individual and communal priorities and value systems. Efforts to address their educational situation will be successful only if they make every effort to understand, acknowledge, and respect these choices – much as the Ju'hoansi recognize and respect the will and autonomy of individuals. The responses of Ju'hoansi individuals and communities to education can be recognized as legitimate, strategic, and sustainable responses to the current educational and livelihood choices available to them today (and in the predictable future). I outline four aspects of this recognition below, and discuss the implications for outsiders – including researchers, education providers, donors, and others – who wish to support educational efforts for the Ju'hoansi and other San.

Culturally appropriate responses

The deep incongruence between traditional Ju'hoansi socialization, knowledge transmission practices, and mainstream education is unquestionably one of the primary factors impeding satisfactory entry into and progress through the formal school system in Namibia. As I have argued here and elsewhere, along with many others, this recognition should not translate only into efforts to use their linguistic and cultural backgrounds as springboards for them to enter into the mainstream systems, but should recognize that these backgrounds are a valuable resource in and of themselves (Le Roux 1999; Heckler 1991; Nyati-Ramahobo 2005; Hays 2006). Although the Ju'hoansi clearly state that they want and need access to skills provided by mainstream education (and also by non-formal education and other training programs), they clearly *also* state that they want to maintain their culture and language and that these are important to them in their own right. Furthermore, they actively make choices that prioritize this maintenance.

Resistance

The “failure” of the Ju'hoansi to fully participate in the education system is not only a passive withdrawal; it also registers a form of resistance. The Coolangatta Statement suggests that when the experience of indigenous peoples worldwide is viewed comprehensively, it becomes apparent that withdrawal from school is also a refusal to participate: “so-called ‘dropout rates and failures’ of Indigenous peoples within non-Indigenous educational systems must be viewed for what they really are – rejection rates” (1999:1.3.1). As Gordon and Sholto-Douglas point out, resistance in the form of refusal to participate is a strategy that the San have historically used against incorporation into state systems, in which they would be

in a state of dependency (2000). Currently, many San are indeed locked into a cycle of dependency upon the national government and other aid agencies – and they are still engaged in resisting this dependence in a variety of ways. This includes declining to participate in an education system in which they, their home cultures, and their backgrounds are not respected, and the advantages of which are not always evident. Failure to acknowledge the legitimacy of this refusal is a failure to recognize the right of the Ju!'hoansi community to determine the best educational approach for their children.

Strategic responses

The Ju!'hoansi, like other hunter-gatherers, are by necessity always engaged in making strategic decisions based upon an assessment of realistic options. Individuals and communities are choosing to remain flexible in their educational options and their subsistence strategies. This does not mean that they are satisfied with the choices that are available to them; indeed many say they would like to have improved educational facilities, better teachers, schools closer to home, and adult literacy classes. They would also like to have more secure access to land and other resources, and for their culture and land rights to be respected by other groups. But, in the face of rapid change and insecurity, people are seeking to lessen their vulnerability and are actively making decisions – including those regarding education – with this in mind. In cases like this, insisting upon formal education, as it exists in Namibia today, for all of a community's children would ultimately result not only in social breakdown, but in the loss of a unique knowledge base, upon which some groups, such as the Ju!'hoansi, still depend for survival – I will return to this below.

Positive responses

Finally, in some cases, individuals use education to further their own purposes – in ways, which may or may not be recognized by outsiders. There are a handful of cases of individuals who have achieved high enough levels of education to enable them to put their skills to use in the service of their community – as teachers, principal, political representatives, or other positions. These are the individuals often held up as examples of “success.” Such individuals play an important and necessary role in the ongoing negotiation between the Ju!'hoansi and the broader societal institutions. Many of those who have chosen to take on these roles have made difficult choices, and enormous sacrifices, as has been described in earlier chapters.

Less often noticed are the ways in which individuals make efforts to get what they can from the education system, without compromising their other options. The students who claim that they are happy in school, although their teachers complain that they are frequent

ly absent, for example, are finding ways to attend school and gain at least some access, not only to the language but also to the social, literacy, mathematical, and other skills available there, without having to give up their autonomy or their access to bush skills. It may be, in fact, that individuals such as these have the most flexible options for negotiating the complicated social and economic transition that the Ju'l'hoansi are currently in.

The role of outsiders

Recognizing what is often perceived as failure, passive victim-hood, lack of concern or childish rebellion as a legitimate response is a powerful critique to the dominant institutions. But simply recognizing this, while perhaps theoretically empowering, actually does little to help achieve the goals of the oppressed population. Hale sums up the difficult balancing act that existence on the margins of the dominant political and economic systems entails:

Oppressed peoples, in the vast majority of cases, have no alternative but to wage struggles for rights and redress using the language, the legal and political tools, and even the funding of their oppressors. They regularly engage in subversion, imbue the dominant with alternative meanings, find room for maneuver, and in so doing bring about consequences that are quite different from those the dominant actors had in mind. [2006:111]

The conditions in which they are operating, Hale points out, often impose formidable constraints, and it important not to minimize these. Recognizing the dynamics described above does not mean, for example, that all individuals are engaged in resistance or refusal all the time, or that we should overemphasize or romanticize this resistance.

Hale points to a balancing act that outsiders involved with such communities must undertake. We should recognize the enormous constraints that people like the Ju'l'hoansi are under without further binding them in, and we must acknowledge their extraordinary resourcefulness and resilience without suggesting that the situation in which they currently find themselves is what they would choose, if they had options beyond mere survival open to them. We do not know what they would choose if they were presented with access to sufficient land to maintain traditional lifestyles, options for full and unhindered participation in dominant institutions, and education that they themselves control and define. The best we can do, as outsiders, is seek to widen the range of options available to them where possible and – equally important – do our best not to restrict these options.

One way in which options for the Ju'l'hoansi become restricted is through polarized discussions about them, their history, and what constitutes an appropriate form of development. Differing approaches to the Ju'l'hoansi and their development entail different ap-



Fig. 37: N!amace demonstrates for tourists how Ju!'hoansi can get water from roots during the dry season. Water roots are one of the most important sources of food (and liquid) for Nyae Nyae residents (2011)

proaches to education. Those who emphasize the need for social, political, and economic integration focus primarily on access to mainstream education, where Ju!'hoansi learn both the knowledge and skills that they need to enter into the national (and global) political and economic arenas, and how to get along with people from other ethnic groups (this is the dominant approach today in Namibia). On the other hand, for those who perceive current value in their knowledge, skills, and culture and believe that maintaining it requires specific forms of education, finding alternatives to the current mainstream schools is imperative.

These two goals are not at odds; both are critical. One element to their compatibility, however, is the recognition that access to mainstream languages and skills are best acquired following a strong grounding in home language and culture, and that respect for and recognition of this culture must be a central component throughout the educational process. Thus an educational approach that privileges the Ju!'hoansi language and traditional knowledge does not have to isolate – on the contrary, a well-designed approach will allow the Ju!'hoansi access to the skills that they determine to be the most useful, including both tra-

ditional and mainstream ones. Acceptance of such an approach, however, will depend upon the recognition of radically different forms of education. It will also require a re-thinking of the firm distinction between formal and non-formal education, and between “school” and “adult education.” Bob Boughton, who has conducted engaged research on adult education with Australian Aboriginal communities emphasizes that a simple ideal of “inclusion” will not be enough:

Indigenous economic, social and cultural practices require their own forms of education to sustain them, and this cannot occur through people simply being “included” where they once were “excluded.” Rather, the systems that seek to include them, including schools and universities have to accept that this requires the negotiation of new forms of power sharing, not only in classrooms and courses, but at an institution and system level. [2005:204]

What are these economic, social and cultural practices of the Ju’hoansi, and what kinds of education will sustain them? And, what does “power sharing” entail? The remainder of this chapter will explore these questions in relation to the Nyae Nyae Ju’hoansi.

Economic options at Nyae Nyae

The traditional hunting and gathering lifestyle described by the Harvard Kalahari Research Group and other early researchers is no longer able to sustain the Ju’hoan people fully. Over the course of a few centuries, the land base of the San was drastically diminished; San populations were hunted, some to extinction, and driven into the most marginal environments and the most marginal social positions within the settler economy. Those who were living autonomously as hunters and gatherers only 50 years ago are now no longer able to do so. With this option no longer viable, the San must find other ways to supplement their subsistence. In particular, they need a means of gaining entry into the cash economy, and education is presented as the key to this door.

Unfortunately, there are very few good examples of this. In fact, achieving higher levels in school does not by any means ensure good economic options. A notable finding of Lee’s recent survey of Tsumkwe town (described in Chapter 2) was that education level does not correlate positively with wage employment (2013:223). As Fig. 38 illustrates, while 50 % of those with no education (six out of twelve) were employed, among those with some level of education (from Grades 1 to 12) only 28% were employed; those in the higher bracket with nine to twelve years were employed at a rate of 40%, based on a sample of five. Lee points out that the likely explanation for the high employment rate of those with no education is that most of these are elders including the heads of the tribal authority and the conservancy

who “are elected on the basis of their life experience, not their level of education” (ibid.). It may also reflect the fact that many of the employment positions available to and occupied by Ju’hoansi are menial labor requiring little or no education. Other positions such as the office managers and clerks do require literacy and numeracy skills, and those who have appropriate levels of education fill these.

Level of Education	With Job	No Job	Percentage with Job
Zero Education (n=12)	6	6	50
Grades 1–4 (n = 22)	6	16	27
Grades 5–8 (n = 12)	3	9	25
Grades 9–12 (n = 5)	2	3	40
All with education (n = 39)			28

Fig. 38: *Level of education and jobs in Tsumkwe (Lee 2013:223; used with permission)*

Still, of five individuals who had made it through at least one year of secondary education or higher – *three of them were unemployed*. This is worth emphasizing, because it directly contradicts the assumption that achieving higher levels of education will automatically result in formal employment. It will certainly open up some opportunities. But it is far from guaranteeing access to a reliable income. This finding is supported by my own research, by Dieckmann et al. 2014, and Ninkova 2015, and is crucial to decision-making about education in the region.

They get used to coming and going

In Chapter 9, I quoted Cwi, the Village School Principal, who was describing efforts to involve them in the Village Schools and the difficulty of doing so. One focus of this dialogue with the parents is to “convince them of the importance of education” and to

try to convince them to let the children stay behind in their village to attend school when the parents go out to gather devil’s claw, or do other hunting or gathering, or if they go to Tsumkwe ... often the parents will take the children out of school when they leave the village. Then the children get used to coming and going instead of just staying in the school. [Presentation, WIPCE 2008]

Although Cwi is a member of the community who understands the local dynamics very well, here, in his role as a school principal, he is echoing the dominant discourses of education which blame the parents (in this case, their lack of understanding of the importance of education) and their decision to take the children with them into the bush when they go

out to gather food or sellable plant products. In Chapter 3, the Tsumkwe Primary School principal (who is not Jul'hoan) is quoted as complaining that the students did not like staying in one place all the time because they “were not used to it;” above Cwi also identifies this as a problem.

Let's look a little more closely at this, in light of the argument (and figures) above. If the parents, or the children, were calculating this from a perspective of how best to invest their time, what activity would it make sense to choose? Accompanying their parents into the bush to learn about gathering skills may be a far wiser investment of time than attending school – given current employment patterns at Tsumkwe, and the risks involved with moving away. This is particularly true for Devils Claw, which is an important source of income for Conservancy members. It was one of those most consistently identified in the regional survey (Hays et al. 2014). Victoria Haraseb, a Heil'om woman and the former Early Childhood Development (ECD) coordinator for WIMSA, has commented on this general phenomenon in Namibia noting that

Government workers often complain that [San] parents take their children with them when they move. However, parents need to take advantage of limited economic opportunities, and they do not want to leave their young children behind. Furthermore, often the activities practiced by the parents is a form of education – children learn about medicinal and edible plants, hunting techniques, and other survival skills; and they learn traditional handicrafts. To provide effective education for these communities, this kind of education should be recognized as such, and efforts to improve access to formal education needs to be more sensitive to seasonal movements. [2011:137]

One of the important aspects of the Village Schools is that it allows learners to do both – access some “school” skills and to go out in the bush with their parents. This is not a drawback, as it is presented by both of the principals, but an enormous advantage. In fact, if this kind of flexibility could be incorporated up to higher grade levels, there is a good chance that many more Nyae Nyae residents would reach these levels – *and* retain the traditional skills that that are still an important part of their combined economy.

The village of ||Xaloba has one of the earliest Village Schools, and was one of the first Nyae Nyae Villages that I visited in 1998. It became an interesting site to explore the ways in which people are making strategic choices about education and subsistence.

||Xaloba

Guided by a sign pointing the way to the *Living Hunters Museum*, tourists drive into the village of ||Xaloba, in which people are occupied with their daily activities and wearing their usual everyday attire – a mix of Western clothes and brightly colored African cloths, ranging

from bright and new to discolored tatters. The tourists are then directed to the campground a few hundred meters down the road, where they can review the information in a shaded visitors' stand while they wait. In a short while, they are met by one or a small group of villagers (one of whom can speak English), who have changed into their traditional skin clothing and ostrich eggshell jewelry. The visitors can discuss with the guides which activities they would like to watch, or participate in: they can go on a bushwalk for plant identification, or with the aim of hunting; they can receive demonstrations of traditional skills such as fire-making and shelling mongongo nuts; they can watch a traditional trance dance around the fire.

The Living Hunters Museum, introduced in Chapter 2, is a community-initiated and run tourism project, in which the village residents charge visitors fees to demonstrate aspects of their culture. There is no pretense that the Jul'hoansi are living as pristine hunters and gatherers; the first contact the tourists have is of people wearing western clothes, in a village that includes some "modern" shelters like tents and corrugated metal sheeting. At the same time, the Jul'hoansi are clearly presenting to people activities that they are highly skilled at – because they currently use these skills on a regular basis for survival. Any villagers who want to can participate voluntarily in the presentation; children also sometimes join. There is a place for people to display their crafts, and tourists buy them. People from the village decide together how the money earned is distributed. A certain percentage goes to the individuals who participated in the actual activity or who made the craft, and a smaller percentage into a general village account to be used for village expenses. All the interactions with tourists that I have seen at this village have been positive, and the community themselves speak very highly of the project – they clearly enjoy the opportunity to demonstrate their culture and skills.

In Chapter 9 I described a group of young men between 15 and 23, who had dropped out of school in Tsumkwe and were living in ||Xa|oba. When I asked these youth what they would like to do when they are older, almost all responded with jobs or activities that were based either in the village – hunting, working at the living museum, or as village schools teacher – or in Tsumkwe, for example as a shop-owner or a policeman (the government had a special program to recruit San police at that time; see Dieckmann et al. 2014). All of these are realistic possibilities, for which they will need to cultivate a variety of different skills – not all of which are linked to the formal education system.

One particularly interesting response was that of Komtsa whom we met in Chapter 8. He said he wanted to stay in his village, and to work with his parents, to do translation, and to work as a tour guide. In ||Xa|oba, the existence of the Living Hunters Museum, as well as the Village School, makes the option of staying in the village especially

attractive. When I asked him whether he felt that his few years of schooling had benefited him, Komtsa said:

Although I'm not that educated, I am using the bit that I got from it. I am working at the Living Hunters Museum, and I'm doing the health training workshop. I also hunt with a bow and arrow."¹ [Interview, October 2011]

Like many others, Komtsa managed to wrest some important skills from the limited educational opportunities he had, including basic English and literacy skills. Today, he draws upon those abilities as the opportunities arise, while at the same time, maintaining his "bush" skills. The latter is important, he said (echoing the response of almost every Jul'hoan person that I have asked about this), "because it is our culture, and because we get food from it." Today, this knowledge is also a marketable skill that tourists and others will pay to see performed. Komtsa, like others in his community, is exploiting all of the available opportunities that he can, at his own pace. Given the current lack of formal employment opportunities in the area, the numerous obstacles they face in the town of Tsumkwe, and the desire of people to stay close to their families and land, it is not at all obvious that obtaining formal educational qualifications would provide better opportunities for all Jul'hoansi.

Outcomes

In a 1992 report on the NNFC (see Chapter 2), Hitchcock notes that one of the difficulties of fully involving local people in development and community empowerment processes is that "easily definable outcomes are given preference over less easily quantifiable indicators" which may be of critical importance (1992:10). In terms of education, the most clearly measurable outcomes are the numbers of children who attend school, the number of years they are there, and the qualifications that they achieve. These are not, however, the only markers of success. The Jul'hoansi prize their relationships with each other, their ability to get food from their surroundings, and facility in traditional skills such as healing and hunting.

Boughton and Durnan argue that this focus on supposedly measurable outcomes, in an effort to reach a quantifiable goal of equity in education, assumes that the outcomes defined by indigenous peoples themselves will match those of educational planners. They suggest that over the last two decades, indigenous peoples in Australia have been increasingly requiring society to recognize their rights to "freely determine their political status

¹ In the Nyae Nyae Conservancy, people have the right to hunt for their own use, using traditional methods; hunting with guns is not allowed.

and freely pursue their economic social and cultural development.” But, ask Boughton and Durnan,

what if the choices those peoples ‘freely make’ fail to result in equity, as defined by the dominant, non-Indigenous society and its institutions? In practical terms, if some Indigenous people choose to speak their own language, live on their own lands, and develop their own semi-subsistence style economies – as many in fact do, in varying degrees – then how does that tally with the requirement of an equity policy that says they will have the same educational and employment outcomes as non-Indigenous peoples, the vast majority of whom live close to major urban labor markets and a full range of English-speaking educational institutions? [2004:62]

Some Ju!’hoansi certainly do want access to education and training opportunities including (but not limited to) those allowing them to go on to become small business owners, police, drivers, project administrators, builders, teachers, principals, and translators, to work with government ministries, or any number of other local subsistence options. Some may aspire to move out of Nyae Nyae to larger urban areas (though few express such a desire). When asked, most children and youth respond with options that are within the Conservancy or Tsumkwe town. To compete in the job market for many of these positions, however, requires at least some basic skills learned in school, and often a school certificate. So far, after 25 years of English language education at the Tsumkwe school, the available educational options at Tsumkwe have not been able to provide Ju!’hoan learners with these skills.

The dropout rate of the Ju!’hoansi at Tsumkwe school before receiving a school certificate is currently 100 percent – with the vast majority leaving before they finish Grade 4, if they attend at all. Although supporting Ju!’hoan learners in their efforts to go through the school is worthwhile, given local, national, and international patterns it seems highly unlikely that the coming years will see a dramatic change in these numbers, unless very major changes happen at Tsumkwe School. Even with changes – for example, such as those suggested in Chapter 8 – a significant portion of Nyae Nyae children will remain in their villages for all of the reasons that have been noted already in this book, and by many other authors. They like it there.

In the preface to the second edition of his book on the Dobe Ju!’hoansi, Lee makes an argument for recognizing the legitimacy of the way of life of the Ju!’hoansi:

[W]e are in danger of losing sight of the fact that the !Kung [Ju!’hoansi] and many people like them have, even in our lifetimes, lived good lives without the benefit of wage labor, bank accounts, credit cards, or supermarkets. They have raised generations of children and taught them dignity, self-respect, and the skills of life without schools, television, or Nintendo, and have cared for their elderly without pension plans or “old folks” homes. Perhaps more remarkable, they have been able to

do all this while living lightly on the land in a degree of harmony with their natural environment, in what might be termed the oldest example of sustainable development. In short, even in this hard-bitten age of social and ecological crisis, of wars and economic depression, the !Kung San show us that other ways of being are possible. [1993; 2013:xii²]

Lee, like Hale, makes clear that this is not about perpetuating a romantic image of the Ju/'hoansi and other San – but about doing our best to understand the story that they are telling us, with their words and their actions.

In an interview with Biesele in July 2010, she replied to a question about whether the Village Schools might be a good model for San elsewhere in Namibia: “I think it has done something to keep open a space for the idea of what is appropriate for some groups of people.” The Village Schools, set within the Nyae Nyae Conservancy, do indeed provide a reminder that other educational and ecological possibilities exist. Education decision-makers, teachers, development workers, researchers, and others could be asking what we have to learn from the Ju/'hoansi. They and other San, and indigenous groups around the world, pose a challenge to the current dominance of western approaches. The traditional educational strategies of the Ju/'hoansi and other hunter-gatherers may have unexpected value as we seek to adapt our own educational approaches to new circumstances in a rapidly-changing world.

Who owns education?

In this book I have examined the Nyae Nyae Village Schools from a variety of perspectives – from the micro-level interactions of individuals and a small community, to the macro-level historical, social, and economic forces and patterns that they are a part of. I have considered the role of culture, language, subsistence patterns, and economic opportunities, and the challenges posed by logistical and social barriers. The establishment of the Village Schools was an effort to get beyond racist and abusive approaches to education, to build upon and validate the local culture, while also creating a bridge to formal education, so that more Ju/'hoansi could participate in the national education system. What the VSP initially underestimated – and what has still not been overcome – are the enormous barriers that structural inequality creates for people like the Ju/'hoansi in formal education systems. Unchallenged, these structural barriers severely limit the success of all efforts focused on increasing the educational participation the San.

² This preface, originally in the second edition from 1993, is reprinted in the 2013 fourth edition, which is cited here.

But the Jul'hoansi, and other San, do not behave like passive victims. A primary focus of this book has been on what people are actually doing, what choices they are making, and trying to understand why. Far from being unconcerned about education, the Jul'hoansi are taking active ownership of the opportunities available to them. Faced with the choice of relinquishing control over their own lives in an uncertain economic and social environment, Jul'hoansi, as a community and as individuals, are choosing to maintain their autonomy, flexible economic options and their cultural identity. Some refuse to participate in a system in which they know that they and their communities are at a severe disadvantage, and the long-term benefits of which are uncertain. Others continue to try, despite these disadvantages, in a manner that befits their own circumstances and needs. People explore training options that are available, and various income generation possibilities – they gain access to various skills, as the opportunities arise. They are also holding on to time-tested strategies based on their knowledge of the local physical and social environment. It is the Nyae Nyae community that owns this kind of learning, and they are clearly maintaining that ownership. This is something that only they can do, and they are not dependent upon anyone else to show them this knowledge or tell them how to communicate it to their children.

Other hunter-gatherers, and other indigenous peoples around the world are also refusing to attend schools where their languages and cultures are not respected, in which they are at a huge disadvantage, and which they do not see as relevant to their daily lives. The focus should not be on convincing them to make a different choice, in the absence of clearly viable economic options and a vastly improved school environment. We should instead be striving to recognize, and respect the legitimacy of the choices that people are making and the ways that they are all in their own ways n!arohkxaosi: owners of learning.

We are not a people who buy land. We ourselves do not buy land. Instead, we are BORN on land. My father taught me about his father, who taught him about the foods of our land. Your father's father teaches you. People have taught each other and taught each other and taught each other. People have died but the teaching has gone on.

*Tsamkxao ‡Oma, then chairperson of the NNFC, 1987
(quoted in Bieseke and Hitchcock 2011:29).*

Afterword

The story of the Village Schools does not end in 2015. As this book goes to press, there are major uncertainties looming, and the Nyae Nyae community in general remains in a vulnerable position. In particular, a large shadow hangs over the Village Schools: the withdrawal of external funding. In mid-2015, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) announced that, after 35 years, it will cease its funding to Namibiaforeningen – the organization referred to in this book by the name used in Namibia – NAMAS. As described in the text, NAMAS has developed a long-term relationship with Namibian education initiatives since 1980, and since 2004 has provided critical support that has allowed the Village Schools to continue as government schools without losing the community-based character that defined the project from the beginning.

Another significant threat is to their land; almost seven years after the initial invasion, Herero farmers are still living with their animals in Tsumkwe, and are reportedly accumulating more cattle and continuing to illegally use the plant resources of Nyae Nyae. Intensive efforts by the LAC in Windhoek to encourage the enforcement of legislation at the local level, and the engagement of national authorities on the issue, have not proven successful. In July 2015 the NNC laid criminal charges against four illegal grazers, and Conservancy members began clearly marking their territory. By November 2015 there had been virtually no investigation, and the Conservancy wrote a letter protesting the slowness of the police response. As this book goes to press, the police are investigating but no decision has been made and problems are ongoing (John Hazam, personal communication, February 2016). The protection of hunter-gatherers' lands requires legal enforcement of local, national and international laws - without such protection they are extremely vulnerable to neighbors and other groups with more resource-intensive land use strategies, as this case illustrates.

The situation at the Tsumkwe Primary School remains problematic. Students report beatings, bullying, lack of proper accommodation, and general unpreparedness for school (Ninkova 2015; Heckler, personal communication, July 2015). Some particular complaints serve to underscore my arguments here. In mid-2015, a TPS teacher was widely accused of beating San and non-San students, and was investigated. The charges were confirmed, and in addition, this teacher – who had been accusing San students of stealing food – was found to be stealing it himself and stocking his freezer. Students also reported being sent by teachers to buy alcohol, and were afraid to refuse. The regional education office has shown great

concern about the problems, and has promised action. At the time of writing, however, none of the teachers responsible for these illegal activities has been removed from the school. No efforts have been made by school officials to make Tsumkwe School a better place for the Village Schools students.

There are also some hopeful developments. In 2015, there were ten Village Schools teachers, and most of them were Ju'hoansi. They were paid by the Ministry of Education, and received support from the NAMAS Project Coordinator (Bruce Parcher, who was also acting as a teacher advisor). Only two of them had passed Grade 12; one of these has one year of further training and one of them has three years of tertiary training. The other eight did not have their Grade 12 qualifications. Despite the lack of official qualifications, Parcher reported early in the year that

[t]heir commitment and professionalism is way up along with attendance. The number of schools is back up to six, so they are reaching more children. We also hope to open a Tsumkwe Village School right in town to give parents of young children a choice for mother tongue instruction over the English-medium Tsumkwe Primary School. That can only happen if we get at least two or three more teachers. [personal communication, March 2015]

The Ju'hoan Transcription Group has taken up the idea of recognizing language qualifications, and in 2014 issued Certificates of Training and Professional Development for the members of the JTG who had been working there for ten to twelve years. These are an indication of dedicated language work, and could be used to identify qualified language professionals, who could be employed at the schools even if they are not technically qualified as teachers.

In June 2014, the University Centre for Studies in Namibia (TUCSIN) launched a new project in Tsumkwe. TUCSIN, a non-profit NGO dedicated to providing relevant quality higher education to all Namibians, bought the Tsumkwe Lodge, which had previously been owned by a series of individuals and organizations that ran it as a for-profit enterprise and delivered very little back to the Nyae Nyae community financially or in terms of training. Though still in the early planning phases, TUCSIN Tsumkwe is drawing up a proposal as a part of its Informal Education Project, with the goal of providing vocational training in areas identified by the community (including tourism, horticulture, English, and other practical skills) as well as to help students upgrade their current qualifications – such support would be very valuable to the Village Schools teachers. The plan is to use the existing lodge structure simultaneously as an education and training center, and as a tourist lodge that can generate funds and provide tourism training and job opportunities for the Nyae Nyae community. If it is able to move forward as envisaged, TUCSIN Tsumkwe will fill an enormous

gap in the Nyae Nyae area, by providing relevant training in an environment that respects and values the language and culture.

Finally, a very positive impact over 25 years of operation of the Village Schools is that the Nyae Nyae community has had the opportunity to develop a vision of education other than the problematic model available to them through mainstream formal schooling. One result of this is the high level of interest among the community and its leaders towards education in general, and clarity about what they want. In her 2015 evaluation for NAMAS, Ninkova concludes that community leaders are much more aware of their educational rights, in large part as a result of the existence of the Village Schools.

Despite the complexities described in this book, the Village Schools represent great progress towards achieving educational rights for one community – and their closure would be an enormous loss not only for Nyae Nyae, but for San education efforts across the region. Sustaining the schools will require a high level of commitment and coordination on the part of many stakeholders. Efforts in this direction have begun, and financial support is being sought for a variety of initiatives. The story of the Nyae Nyae Village Schools continues to unfold.

Funding and support

During my years of working in Southern Africa, I have seen that funding presents a major barrier for San education initiatives. A lack of available funds to fully implement projects, especially long-term funding, is an obvious constraint. Even when funds are available, however, donors – especially large government and international donors – usually demand that projects meet certain requirements by demonstrating progress and success through easily identified and quantified “outcomes” (as described in the conclusion) in order to continue receiving funding. These requirements often have the effect of removing decision-making processes from the hands of the community. In this environment, the importance of donors like NAMAS for San education cannot be overstated.

NAMAS has been providing on-the-ground support for the schools, for over 10 years, including the critical support for teachers through the position of the teacher advisor. Both practical and visionary, NAMAS dedicated its efforts to finding the best solutions within the particular policy and economic environment of Namibia. Based on their experience in Nyae Nyae and in southern Africa, and their informed concern for the dilemma of San education in the region, they were poised to play a major and instrumental role in the further development of education initiatives across the border in Botswana and in South Africa, and the withdrawal of their funds has been a great disappointment for many involved with San education in the region. It will be difficult for the Village Schools to continue as they are without

the support of NAMAS, and in particular without a locally-based coordinator and teacher advisor who can provide ongoing, responsive support. The Namibian Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture has committed to purchase a vehicle for the Village Schools; this will help, but will not solve the complex problems. The schools are difficult to administrate, and local knowledge is absolutely crucial.

Education is an important global funding priority, with the clear goal of providing Education for All. When “all” includes hundreds of millions of people around the world who currently do not have adequate access to education, peoples like the Ju|’hoansi who number only a few thousand disappear within the statistics, becoming a negligible casualty of an approach that favors sweeping, centralized projects. What is the importance of a little group of people living in the desert in a corner of a southern African country? Unless we are able to recognize the potential value of such cultures, and to include specific protection for them and for their rights as funding priorities, we will be allowing some of the world’s richest and most resourceful – but also most vulnerable – cultures and languages to slip through the cracks.

List of abbreviations

BERP	Namibian Basic Educational Reform Programme
BED	Basic Education Diploma
BETD	Basic Education Teachers Diploma
BISC	Basic Instructional Skills Certificate
ILO 169	International Labour Organization Convention 169
INSET	In-Service Training
ISC	Instructional Skills Certificate
JTG	Ju 'hoan Transcription Group
JBDF	Ju wa Bushman Development Fund
KFO	Kuru Family of Organizations
KPF	Kalahari Peoples Fund
KPN	Kalahari Peoples Network
LAC	Legal Assistance Centre
MBESC	Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture
NAMAS	The Namibia Association of Norway (<i>Namibiaforeningen</i>)
NIED	National Institute for Educational Development
NNC	Nyae Nyae Conservancy
NNFC	Nyae Nyae Farmers' Cooperative
NNDFN	Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
SPERA	Support Program for Education in Remote Areas (Botswana)
TA	Traditional Authorities
TSSS	Tsumkwe Senior Secondary School
TJSS	Tsumkwe Junior Secondary School
TPS	Tsumkwe Primary School
TRC	Teachers Resource Centre
TUCSIN	The University Centre for Studies in Namibia
UNAM	University of Namibia
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
VISCO	Village Schools Coordinator
VSP	Village Schools Project
WIMSA	Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in southern Africa

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This book describes the Nyae Nyae Village Schools, an innovative and unique mother-tongue education initiative set in north-eastern Namibia. Inspired by the optimism of Independence, the project was designed in close consultation with the Ju|'hoansi community in the early 1990s. Drawing upon their traditional knowledge transmission strategies, and initiated in a supportive political environment, the project exemplified 'best practice.' During the two decades that have followed, the Village Schools have transitioned from a donor-supported 'project' to government schools, and have received much attention and support from donors, civil society organisations, researchers, and others.

However, the students still do not seem to succeed in the mainstream schools. Why is this? Based on long-term fieldwork in the region, including interviews with Nyae Nyae residents over several years and work with involved organisations, this book addresses this question. Contextualising the Village Schools within post-Independence Namibia, southern African history and the global indigenous rights movement, it examines the enormous paradoxes that schooling presents for the Nyae Nyae community. 'Owners of Learning' is the English translation of the Ju|'hoansi word for 'teacher' and it serves to highlight a fundamental question – to whom does education belong?

This book ... conveys a closely observed and intimately felt perspective, while at the same time amplifying the voices of so many San parents and elders who would otherwise not have had the opportunity to speak. May this book once and for all open those doors still closed for them by easing the understanding and softening the will of those who hold the power to change.

Willemien le Roux

Anthropologist *Jennifer Hays* has conducted fieldwork on education for indigenous communities in southern Africa since 1998, as an academic researcher and a consultant for local and international organizations. She has written extensively on education and indigenous rights, and organised international conferences on these topics. She is currently based at the University of Tromsø in Norway.

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